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EB 9
The "Princess Pat" —14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristacrat" flexible bracelet to match. $2.35 a month

EB 31 . . . Nationally advertised and guaranteed **Elgin** or **Waltham** movement; engraved white or green gold filled 20 year case. Latest, flexible mesh, wrist band. $2.65 a month.

EB 34 . . . $25
Richly hand-engraved 18K Solid White Gold solitaire mounting; fiery, genuine blue-white diamond. $2 a mo.

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EB 7 . . .
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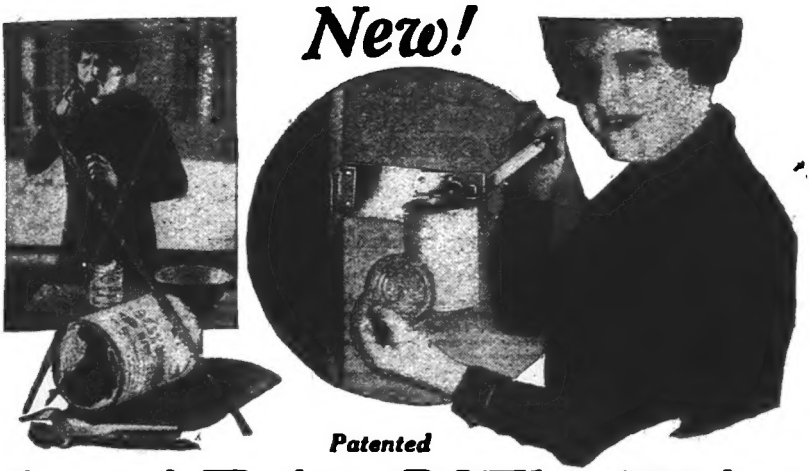

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AGENTS!

$265 in a Week

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Big Money Spare Time
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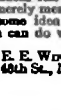

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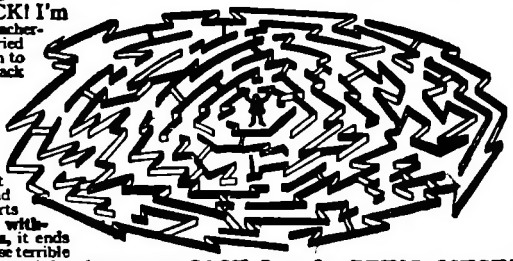

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Age .....City .....State.....

Two long arms shot silently down and grasped the motionless figure.

Stolen Brains

By Captain S. P. Meek

"I HOPE, Carnes," said Dr. Bird, "that we get good fishing."

"Good fishing? Will you please tell me what you are talking about?"

"I am talking about fishing, old dear. Have you seen the evening paper?"

"No. What's that got to do with it?"

Dr. Bird, scientific sleuth extraordinary, goes after a sinister stealer of brains.

Dr. Bird tossed across the table a copy of the *Washington Post* folded so as to bring uppermost an item on page three. Carnes saw his picture staring at him from the center of the page.

"What the dickens?" he exclaimed as he bent over the sheet. With growing astonishment he read that

Operative Carnes of the United States Secret Service had collapsed at his desk that afternoon and had been rushed to Walter Reed Hospital where the trouble had been diagnosed as a nervous breakdown caused by overwork. There followed a guarded statement from Admiral Clay, the President's personal physician, who had been called into conference by the army authorities.

The Admiral stated that the Chief of the Washington District was in no immediate danger but that a prolonged rest was necessary. The paper gave a glowing tribute to the detective's life and work and stated that he had been given sick leave for an indefinite period and that he was leaving at once for the fishing lodge of his friend, Dr. Bird of the Bureau of Standards, at Squapan Lake, Maine. Dr. Bird, the article concluded, would accompany and care for his stricken friend. Carnes laid aside the paper with a gasp.

"DO you know what all this means?" Carnes demanded.

"It means, Carnsey, old dear, that the fishing at Squapan Lake should be good right now and that I feel the need of accurate information on the subject. I didn't want to go alone, so I engineered this outrage on the government and am taking you along for company. For the love of Mike, look sick from now on until we are clear of Washington. We leave to-night. I already have our tickets and reservations and all you have to do is to collect your tackle and pack your bags for a month or two in the woods and meet me at the Pennsy station at six to-night."

"And yet there are some people who say there is no Santa Claus," mused Carnes. "If I had really broken down from overwork, I would probably have had my pay docked for the time I was absent, but a man with official pull in this man's government wants to go fishing and presto! the wheels move and the way is clear. Doctor, I'll meet you as directed."

"Good enough," said Dr. Bird. "By the way, Carnes," he went on as the operative opened the door, "bring your pistol."

Carnes whirled about at the words.

"Are we going on a case?" he asked.

"That remains to be seen," replied the Doctor enigmatically. "At all events, bring your pistol. In answer to any questions, we are going fishing. In point of fact, we are—with ourselves as bait. If you have a little time to spare this afternoon you might drop around to the office of the *Post* and get them to show you all the amnesia cases they have had stories on during the past three months. They will be interesting reading. No more questions now, old dear, we'll have lots of time to talk things over while we are in the Maine woods."

LATE the next evening they left the Bangor and Aroostook train at Mesardis and found a Ford truck waiting for them. Over a rough trail they were driven for fifteen miles, winding up at a log cabin which the Doctor announced was his. The truck deposited their belongings and jounced away and Dr. Bird led the way to the cabin, which proved to be unlocked. He pushed open the door and entered, followed by Carnes. The operative glanced at the occupants of the cabin and started back in surprise.

Seated at a table were two figures. The smaller of the two had his back to the entrance but the larger one was facing them. He rose as they entered and Carnes rubbed his eyes and reeled weakly against the wall. Before him stood a replica of Dr. Bird. There was the same six feet two of bone and muscle, the same beetling brows and the same craggy chin and high forehead surmounted by a shock of unruly black hair. In face and figure the stranger was a replica of the famous scientist until he glanced at their hands. Dr. Bird's hands were long and slim with tapering fingers, the hands of a thinker and an artist despite the acid stains

which disfigured them but could not hide their beauty. The hands of his double were stained as were Dr. Bird's, but they were short and thick and bespoke more the man of action than the man of thought.

The second figure arose and faced them and again Carnes received a shock. While the likeness was not so striking, there was no doubt that the second man would have readily passed for Carnes himself in a dim light or at a little distance. Dr. Bird burst into laughter at the detective's puzzled face.

"Carnes," he said, "shake yourself together and then shake hands with Major Trowbridge of the Coast Artillery Corps. It has been said by some people that we favor one another."

"I'm glad to meet you, Major," said Carnes. "The resemblance is positively uncanny. But for your hands, I would have trouble telling you two apart."

THE Major glanced down at his stubby fingers.

"It is unfortunate but it can't be helped," he said. "Dr. Bird, this is Corporal Askins of my command. He is not as good a second to Mr. Carnes as I am to you but you said it was less important."

"The likeness is plenty good enough," replied the Doctor. "He will probably not be subjected to as close a scrutiny as you will. Did you have any trouble in getting here unobserved?"

"None at all, Doctor. Lieutenant Maynard found a good landing field within a half mile of here, as you said he would, and he has his Douglass camouflaged and is standing by. When do you expect trouble?"

"I have no idea. It may come tonight or it may come later. Personally I hope that it comes later so that we can get in a few days of fishing before anything happens."

"What do you expect to happen, Doctor?" demanded Carnes. "Every time I have asked you anything you told me to wait until we were in the Maine woods and we are there now. I read up everything that I could find on amnesia victims during the past three months but it didn't throw much light on the matter to me."

"How many cases did you find, Carnes?"

"Sixteen. There may have been lots more but I couldn't find any others in the *Post* records. Of course, unless the victim were a local man, or of some prominence, it wouldn't appear."

"You got most of them at that. Did any points of similarity strike you as you read them?"

"None except that all were prominent men and all of them mental workers of high caliber. That didn't appear peculiar because it is the man of high mentality who is most apt to crack."

"Undoubtedly. There were some points of similarity which you missed. Where did the attacks take place?"

"Why, one was at— Thunder, Doctor! I did miss something. Every case, as nearly as I can recall, happened at some summer camp or other resort where they were on vacation."

"Correct. One other point. At what time of day did they occur?"

"In the morning, as well as I can remember. That point didn't register."

"They were all discovered in the morning, Carnes, which means that the actual loss of memory occurred during the night. Further, every case has happened within a circle with a diameter of three hundred miles. We are near the northern edge of that circle."

CARNES checked up on his memory rapidly.

"You're right, Doctor," he cried. "Do you think—?"

"Once in a while," replied Dr. Bird dryly. "I think enough to know the futility of guesses hazarded without complete data. We are now located within the limits of the amnesia belt and we are here to find out what did happen, if anything, and not to make wild guesses about it. You have the tent set up for us, Major?"

"Yes, Doctor, about thirty yards from the cabin and hidden so well that you could pass it a dozen times a day without suspecting its existence. The gas masks and other equipment which you sent to Fort Banks are in it."

"In that case we had better dispense with your company as soon as we have eaten a bite, and retire to it. On second thought, we will eat in it. Carnes, we will go to our downy couches at once and leave our substitutes in possession of the cabin. I trust, gentlemen, that things come out all right and that you are in no danger."

Major Trowbridge shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"It is as the gods will," he said sententiously. "It is merely a matter of duty to me, you know, and thank God, I have no family to mourn if anything does go wrong. Neither has Corporal Askins."

"Well, good luck at any rate. Will you guide Carnes to the tent and then return here and I'll join him?"

HUDDLED in the tiny concealed tent, Dr. Bird handed Carnes a haversack on a web strap.

"This is a gas mask," he said. "Put it on your neck and keep it ready for instant use. I have one on and one of us must wear a mask continually while we are here. We'll change off every hour. If the gas used is lethane, as I suspect, we should be able to detect it before its gets too concentrated, but some other gas might be used and we must take no chances. Now look here."

With the aid of a flash-light he showed Carnes a piece of apparatus which had been set up in the tent. It consisted of two telescopic barrels, one fitted with an eye-piece and the other, which was at a wide angle to the first, with an objective glass. Between the two was a covered round disc from which projected a short tube fitted with a protecting lens. This tube was parallel to the telescopic barrel containing the objective lens.

"This is a new thing which I have developed and it is getting its first practical test to-night," he said. "It is a gas detector. It works on the principle of the spectroscope with modifications. From this projector goes out a beam of invisible light and the reflections are gathered and thrown through a prism of the eye-piece. While a spectroscope requires that the substance which it examines be incandescent and throw out visible light rays in order to show the typical spectral lines, this device catches the invisible ultra-violet on a fluorescent screen and analyzes it spectroscopically. Whoever has the mask on must continually search the sky with it and look for the three bright lines which characterize lethane, one at 230, one at 240 and the third at 670 on the illuminated scale. If you see any bright lines in those regions or any other lines that are not continually present, call my attention to it at once. I'll watch for the first hour."

AT the end of an hour Dr. Bird removed his mask with a sigh of relief and Carnes took his place at the spectroscope. For half an hour he moved the glass about and then spoke in a guarded tone.

"I don't see any of the lines you told me to look for," he said, "but in the southwest I get wide band at 310 and two lines at about 520."

Dr. Bird advanced toward the instrument but before he reached it, Carnes gave an exclamation.

"There they are, Doctor!" he cried.

Dr. Bird sniffed the air. A faint sweetish odor became apparent and he reached for his gas mask. Slowly his hands drooped and Carnes grasped him and drew the mask over his face. Dr. Bird rallied slightly and feebly drew a bottle from his pocket and sniffed it. In another instant he was shouldering Carnes aside and staring through the spectroscope. Carnes watched him for an instant and then a low whirring noise attracted his attention and he looked up. Silently he

caught the Doctor's arm in a viselike grip and pointed.

Hovering above the cabin was a silvery globe, faintly luminous in the moonlight. From its top rose a faint cloud of vapor which circled around the globe and descended toward the earth. The globe hovered like a giant humming bird above the cabin and Carnes barely stifled an exclamation. The door of the cabin opened and Major Trowbridge, walking stiffly and like a man in a dream, appeared. Slowly he advanced for ten yards and stood motionless. The globe moved over him and the bottom unfolded like a lily. Two long arms shot silently down and grasped the motionless figure and drew him up into the heart of the globe. The petals refolded, and silently as a dream the globe shot upward and disappeared.

"Gad! They lost no time!" commented Dr. Bird. "Come on, Carnes, run for your life, or rather, for Trowbridge's life. No, you idiot, leave your gas mask on. I'll take the spectroscope; it'll be all we need."

FOLLOWED by the panting Carnes, Dr. Bird sped through the night along an almost invisible path. For half a mile he kept up a headlong pace until Carnes could feel his heart pounding as though it would burst his ribs. The pair debouched from the trees into a glade a few acres in extent and Dr. Bird paused and whistled softly. An answering whistle came from a few yards away and a figure rose in the darkness as they approached.

"Maynard?" called Dr. Bird. "Good enough! I was afraid that you might not have kept your gas mask on."

"My orders were to keep it on, sir," replied the lieutenant in muffled tones through his mask, "but my mechanician did not obey orders. He passed out cold without any warning about fifteen minutes ago."

"Where's your ship?"

"Right over here, sir."

"We'll take off at once. Your craft is equipped with a Bird silencer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come on, Carnes, we're going to follow that globe. Take the front cockpit alone, Maynard; Carnes and I will get in the rear pit with the spec and guide you. You can take off your gas mask at an elevation of a thousand feet. You have pack 'chutes, haven't you?"

"In the rear pit, Doctor."

"Put one on, Carnes, and climb in. I've got to get this spec set up before he gets too high."

The Douglass equipped with the Bird silencer, took the air noiselessly and rapidly gained elevation under the urging of the pilot. Dr. Bird clamped the gas-detecting spectroscope on the front of his cockpit and peered through it.

"Southwest, at about a thousand more elevation," he directed.

"Right!" replied the pilot as he turned the nose of his plane in the indicated direction and began to climb. For an hour and a half the plane flew noiselessly through the night.

"Bald Mountain," said the pilot, pointing. "The Canadian Border is only a few miles away."

"If they've crossed the Border, we're sunk," replied the doctor. "The trail leads straight ahead."

FOR a few minutes they continued their flight toward the Canadian Border and then Dr. Bird spoke.

"Swing south," he directed, "and drop a thousand feet and come back."

The pilot executed the maneuver and Dr. Bird peered over the edge of the plane and directed the spectroscope toward the ground.

"Half a mile east," he said, "and drop another thousand. Carnes, get ready to jump when I give the word."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Carnes as he fumbled for the rip cord of his parachute, "suppose this thing doesn't open?"

"They'll slide you between two barn doors for a coffin and bury you that way," said Dr. Bird grimly. "You know your orders, Maynard?"

"Yes, sir. When you drop, I am to land at the nearest town—it will be Lowell—and get in touch with the Commandant of the Portsmouth Navy Yard if possible. If I get him, I am to tell him my location and wait for the arrival of reenforcements. If I fail to get him on the telephone, I am to deliver a sealed packet which I carry to the nearest United States Marshal. When reenforcements arrive, either from the Navy Yard or from the Marshal, I am to guide them toward the spot where I dropped you and remain, as nearly as I can judge, two miles away until I get a further signal or orders from you."

"That is right. We'll be over the edge in another minute. Are you ready, Carnes?"

"Oh, yes, I'm ready, Doctor, if I have to risk my precious life in this contraption."

"Then jump!"

SIDE by side, Carnes and the doctor dropped toward the ground. The Douglass flew silently away into the night. Carnes found that the sensation of falling was not an unpleasant one as soon as he got accustomed to it. There was little sensation of motion, and it was not until a sharp whisper from Dr. Bird called it to his attention that he realized that he was almost to the ground. He bent his legs as he had been instructed and landed without any great jar. As he rose he saw that Dr. Bird was already on his feet and was eagerly searching the ground with the spectroscope which he had brought with him in the jump.

"Fold your parachute, Carnes, and we'll stow them away under a rock where they can't be seen. We won't use them again."

Carnes did so and deposited the silk bundle beside the doctor's, and they covered them with rocks until they would be invisible from the air.

"Follow me," said the doctor as he strode carefully forward, stopping now and then to take a sight with the spectroscope. Carnes followed him as he made his way up a small hill which blocked the way. A hiss from Dr. Bird stopped him.

Dr. Bird had dropped flat on the ground, and Carnes, on all fours, crawled forward to join him. He smothered an exclamation as he looked over the crest of the hill. Before him, sitting in a hollow in the ground, was the huge globe which had spirited away Major Trowbridge.

"This is evidently their landing place," whispered Dr. Bird. "The next thing to find is their hiding place."

HE rose and started forward but sank at once to the ground and dragged Carnes down with him. On the hill which formed the opposite side of the hollow a line of light showed for an instant as though a door had been opened. The light disappeared and then reappeared, and as they watched it widened and against an illuminated background four men appeared, carrying a fifth. The door shut behind them and they made their way slowly toward the waiting globe. They laid down their burden and one of them turned a flash-light on the globe and opened a door in its side through which they hoisted their burden. They all entered the globe, the door closed and with a slight whirring sound it rose in the air and moved rapidly toward the northeast.

"That's the place we're looking for," muttered Dr. Bird. "We'll go around this hollow and look for it. Be careful where you step; they must have ventilation somewhere if their laboratory is underground."

Followed by the secret service operative, the doctor made his way along the edge of the hollow. They did not dare to show a light and it was slow work feeling their way forward, inch by inch. When they had reached a point above where the doctor thought the light had been he paused.

"There must be a ventilation shaft somewhere around here," he whispered,

his mouth not an inch from Carnes' ear, "and we've got to find it. It would never do to try the door: if any of them are still here it is sure to be guarded. You go up the hill for five yards and I'll go down. Quarter back and forth on a two hundred yard front and work carefully. Don't fall in, whatever you do. We'll return to this point every time we pass it and report."

The operative nodded and walked a few yards up the hill and made his way slowly forward. He went a hundred yards as nearly as he could judge and then stepped five yards further up the hill and made his way back. As he passed the starting point he approached and Dr. Bird's figure rose up.

"Any luck?" he whispered.

Dr. Bird shook his head.

"We'll try further," he said. "I think it is probably beyond us, so suppose you go fifteen yards up and quarter the same as before."

CARNES nodded and stole silently away. Fifteen yards up the hill he went and then paused. He stood on the crest of the hill and before him was a steep, almost precipitous slope. He made his way along the edge for a few yards and then paused. Faintly he could detect a murmur of voices. Inch by inch he crept forward, going over the ground under foot. He paused and listened intently and decided that the sound must come from the slope beneath him. A glance at his watch told him that he had spent ten minutes on this trip and he made his way back to the meeting place.

Dr. Bird was waiting for him, and in a low whisper Carnes reported his discovery. The doctor went back with him and together they renewed the search. The slope of the hill was almost sheer and Carnes looked dubiously over the edge.

"I wish we had brought the parachutes," he whispered to the doctor. "We could have taken the ropes off them and you could have lowered me over the edge."

Dr. Bird chuckled softly and tugged at his middle. Carnes watched him with astonishment in the dim light, but he understoood when Dr. Bird thrust the end of a strong but light silk cord into his hands. He looped it under his arms and the doctor with whispered instructions, lowered him over the cliff. The doctor lowered him for a few feet and then stopped in response to a jerk on the free end. A moment later Carnes signaled to be drawn up and soon stood beside the doctor.

"That's the place all right," he whispered. "The whole cliff is covered with creepers and there is a tree growing right close to it. If we can anchor the cord here, I think that we can slide down to a safe hold on the tree."

A tree stood near and the silk cord was soon fastened. Carnes disappeared over the cliff and in a few moments Dr. Bird slid down the cord to join him. He found the detective seated in the crotch of a tree only a few feet from the face of the cliff. From the cliff came a pronounced murmur of voices. Dr. Bird drew in his breath in excitement and moved forward along the branch. He touched the stone and after a moment of searching he cautiously raised one corner of a painted canvas flap and peered into the cliff. He watched for a few seconds and then slid back and silently pulled Carnes toward him.

TOGETHER the two men made their way toward the cliff and Dr. Bird raised the corner of the flap and they peered into the hill. Before them was a cave fitted up as a cross between a laboratory and a hospital. Almost directly opposite them and at the left of a door in the farther wall was a ray machine of some sort. It was a puzzle to Carnes, and even Dr. Bird, although he could grasp the principle at a glance, was at a loss to divine its use. From a set of coils attached to a generator was connected a tube of the Crookes tube type with the rays from it gathered and thrown by a parabolic

reflector onto the space where a man's head would rest when he was seated in a white metal chair with rubber insulated feet, which stood beneath it. An operating table occupied the other side of the room while a gas cylinder and other common hospital apparatus stood around ready for use.

Seated at a table which occupied the center of the room were three men. The sound of their voices rose from an indistinct murmur to audibility as the flap was raised and the watchers could readily understand their words. Two of them sat with their faces toward the main entrance and the third man faced them. Carnes bit his lip as he looked at the man at the head of the table. He was twisted and misshapen in body, a grotesque dwarf with a hunched back, not over four feet in height. His massive head, sunken between his hunched shoulders, showed a tremendous dome of cranium and a brow wider and even higher than Dr. Bird's. The rest of his face was lined and drawn as though by years of acute suffering. Sharp black eyes glared brightly from deep sunk caverns. The dwarf was entirely bald; even the bushy eyebrows which would be expected from his face, were missing.

"THEY ought to be getting back," said the dwarf sharply.

"If they get back at all," said one of the two figures facing him.

"What do you mean?" growled the dwarf, his eyes glittering ominously. "They'll return all right; they know they'd better."

"They'll return if they can, but I tell you again, Slavatsky, I think it was a piece of foolishness to try to take two men in one night. We got Bird all right, but it is getting late for a second one, and they had to take Bird over a hundred miles and then go nearly three hundred more for Williams. The news about Bird may have been discovered and spread and others may be looking out for us. Carnes might have recovered."

"Didn't he get a full dose of lethane?"

"So Frick says, and Bird certainly had a full dose, but I can't help but feel uneasy. Our operations were going too nicely on schedule and you had to break it up and take on an extra case in the same night as a scheduled one. I tell you, I don't like it."

"I'm sorry that I did it, Carson, but only because the results were so poor. We had planned on Williams for a month and I wanted him. And Bird was so easy that I couldn't resist it."

"And what did you get? Not as much menthium as would have come from an ordinary bookkeeper."

"I'll admit that Bird is a grossly overrated man. He must have worked in sheer luck in his work in the past, for there was nothing in his brain to show it above average. We got barely enough menthium to replace what we used in capturing him."

"We ought to have taken Carnes and left Bird alone," snorted Carson. "Even a wooden-headed detective ought to have given us a better supply than Bird yielded."

"We are bound to meet with disappointments once in a while. I had marked Bird down long ago as soon as I could get a chance at him."

"Well, you ran that show, Slavatsky, but I'll warn you that we aren't going to let you pull off another one like it. I take no more crazy chances, even on your orders."

THE hunchback rose to his feet, his eyes glittering ominously.

"What do you mean, Carson?" he asked slowly, his hand slipping behind him as he spoke.

"Don't try any rough stuff, Slavatsky!" warned Carson sharply. "I can pull a tube as fast as you can, and I'll do it if I have to."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" protested the third man rising, "we are all too deep in this to quarrel. Sit down and let's talk this over. Carson is just worried."

"What is there to be worried about?" grunted the dwarf as he slid back into his chair. "Everything has gone nicely so far and no suspicion has been raised."

"Maybe it has and then again maybe it hasn't," growled Carson. "I think this Bird episode to-night looks bad. In the first place, it came too opportunely and too easily. In the second place Bird should have yielded more menthium, and in the third place, did you notice his hands? They weren't the type of hands to expect on a man of his type."

"Nonsense, they were acid stained."

"Acid stains can be put on. It may be all right, but I am worried. While we are talking about this matter, there is another thing I want cleared up."

"What is it?"

"I think, Slavatsky, that you are holding out on us. You are getting more than your share of the menthium."

Again the dwarf leaped to his feet, but the peace-maker intervened.

"Carson has a right to look at the records, Slavatsky," he said. "I am satisfied, but I'd like to look at them, too. None of us have seen them for two months."

The dwarf glared at first one and then the other.

"All right," he said shortly and limped to a cabinet on the wall. He drew a key from his pocket and opened it and pulled out a leather-bound book. "Look all you please. I was supposed to get the most. It was my idea."

"You were to get one share and a half, while Willis, Frink and I got one share each and the rest half a share," said Carson. "I know how much has been given and it won't take me but a minute to check up.

HE bent over the book, but Willis interrupted.

"Better put it away, Carson," he said, "here come the rest and we don't want them to know we suspect anything."

He pointed toward a disc on the wall which had begun to glow. Slavatsky looked at it and grasped the book from Carson and replaced it in the cabinet. He moved over and started the generator and the tube began to glow with a violet light. A noise came from the outside and the door opened. Four men entered carrying a fifth whom they propped up in the chair under the glowing tube.

"Did everything go all right?" asked the dwarf eagerly.

"Smooth as silk," replied one of the four. "I hope we get some results this time."

The dwarf bent over the ray apparatus and made some adjustments and the head of the unconscious man was bathed with a violet glow. For three minutes the flood of light poured on his head and then the dwarf shut off the light and Carson and Willis lifted the figure and laid it on the operating table. The dwarf bent over the man and inserted the needle of a hypodermic syringe into the back of the neck at the base of the brain. The needle was an extremely long one, and Dr. Bird gasped as he saw four inches of shining steel buried in the brain of the unconscious man.

Slowly Slavatsky drew back the plunger of the syringe and Dr. Bird could see it was being filled with an amber fluid. For two minutes the slow work continued, until a speck of red appeared in the glass syringe barrel.

"Seven and a half cubic centimeters!" cried the dwarf in a tone of delight.

"Fine!" cried Carson. "That's a record, isn't it?"

"No, we got eight once. Now hold him carefully while I return some of it."

SLAVATSKY slowly pressed home the plunger and a portion of the amber fluid was returned to the patient's skull. Presently he withdrew the needle and straightened up and held it toward the light.

"Six centimeters net," he announced. "Take him back, Frink. I'll give Car-

son and Willis their share now and we'll take care of the rest of you when you return. Is the ship well stocked?"

"Enough for two or three more trips."

"In that case, I'll inject this whole lot. Better get going, Frink, it's pretty late."

The four men who had brought the patient in stepped forward and lifted him from the table and bore him out. Dr. Bird dropped the canvas screen and strained his ears. A faint whir told him that the globe had taken to the air. He slid back along the limb of the tree until he touched the rope and silently climbed hand over hand until he gained the crest. He bent his back to the task of raising Carnes, and the operative soon stood beside him on the ledge surmounting the cliff.

"What on earth were they doing?" asked Carnes in a whisper.

"That was Professor Williams of Yale. They were depriving him of his memory. There will be another amnesia case in the papers to-morrow, I haven't time to explain their methods now; we've got to act. You have a flash-light?"

"Yes, and my gun. Shall we break in? There are only three of them, and I think we could handle the lot.

"Yes, but the others may return at any time and we want to bag the whole lot. They've done their damage for to-night. You heard my orders to Lieutenant Maynard, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"He should be somewhere in these hills to the south with assistance of some sort. The signal to them is three long flashes followed in turn by three short ones and three more long. Go and find them and bring them here. When you get close give me the same light signal and don't try to break in unless I am with you. I am going to reconnoitre a little more and make sure that there is no back entrance through which they can escape. Good luck, Carnes; hurry all you can. There is no time to be lost."

THE secret service operative stole away into the night and Dr. Bird climbed back down the rope and took his place at the window. Willis lay on the operating table unconscious, while Slavatsky and Carson studied the now partially emptied syringe.

"You gave him his full share all right," Carson was saying. "I guess you are playing square with us. I'll take mine now."

He lay down on the operating table and the dwarf fitted an anesthesia cone over his face and opened the valve of the gas cylinder. In a moment he closed it and rolled the unconscious men on his face and deftly inserted the long needle. Instead of injecting a portion of the contents of the syringe as Dr. Bird had expected to do, he drew back on the plunger for a minute and then took out the needle and held the syringe to the light.

"Well, Mr. Carson," he said with a malignant glance at the unconscious figure, "that recovers the dose you got a couple of weeks ago while Willis watched me. I don't think you really need any menthium; your brain is too active to suit me as it is."

He gave an evil chuckle and walked to the far side of the cave and opened a secret panel. He drew from a recess a flask and carefully emptied a portion of the contents of the syringe into it. He replaced the flask and closed the panel, and with another chuckle he limped over to a chair and threw himself down in it. For an hour he sat motionless and Dr. Bird carefully worked his way back along the branch and climbed the rope and started for the hollow.

A FAINT whirring noise attracted his attention, and he could see the faintly luminous globe in the distance, rapidly approaching. It came to a stop at the spot where it had previously landed and four men got out. Instead of going toward the cave, they towed the globe, which floated a few inches from the earth, toward the side

of the hill farthest from where the doctor stood. Three of them held it, while the fourth went forward and bent over some controls on the ground. A creaking sound came through the night and the men moved forward with the globe. Presently its movement stopped and men reappeared. Again came the creaking sound and the glow faded out as though a screen had been drawn in front of it. The four men walked toward the door of the cave.

Dr. Bird dropped flat on the ground and saw them pause a few yards below him on the hill and again work some hidden controls. A glare of light showed for an instant and they disappeared and everything was again quiet. Dr. Bird debated the advisability of returning to the window but decided against it and moved down the face of the hill.

Inch by inch he went over the ground, but found nothing. In the darkness he could not locate the door and he made his way around to the back of the hill. The precipice loomed above him, and he swept it with his gaze, but he could locate no opening in the darkness and he dared not use a flash-light. As he turned he faced the east and noted with a start of surprise that the sky was getting red. He glanced at his watch and found that Carnes had been gone for nearly three hours.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Time has gone faster than I realized. He ought to be back at any time now."

HE mounted the highest point of the hill and sent three long flashes, followed in turn by three short and three more long to the south and watched eagerly for an answer. He waited five minutes and repeated the signal, but no answering flashes came from the empty hills. With a grunt which might have meant anything, he turned and made his way toward the opposite side of the hollow where the globe had disappeared. Here he met with more luck. He had marked the location with extreme care and he had not spent over twenty minutes feeling over the ground before his hand encountered a bit of metal. As he pulled on it his eyes sought the side of the hill.

The dawn had grown sufficiently bright for him to see the result of his action. A portion of the hill folded back and the faintly glowing ship became visible. With a muttered exclamation of triumph he approached it.

The globe was about nine feet in diameter and was without visible doors or windows. Around and around it the doctor went, searching for an entrance. The ship now rested solidly on the ground. He failed to find what he sought and his sensitive hands began to go over it searching for an irregularity. He had covered nearly half of it before his finger found a hidden button and pressed it. Silently a door in the side of the craft opened and he advanced to enter.

"Keep them up!" said a sharp voice behind him.

Dr. Bird froze into instant immobility and the voice spoke again.

"Turn around!"

Dr. Bird turned and looked full into the eye of a revolver held by the man the dwarf had addressed as Frink. Behind Frink stood the dwarf and three other men.

As his eye fell on Dr. Bird, Frink turned momentarily pale and staggered back, the revolver wavering as he did so. Dr. Bird made a lightning-like grab for his own weapon, but before he could draw it Frink had recovered and the revolver was again steady.

"Dr. Bird!" gasped Slavatsky. "Impossible!"

"Get his gun, Harris," said Frink.

ONE of the men stepped forward and dextrously removed the doctor's automatic and frisked him expertly to insure himself that he had no other weapon concealed.

"Bring him to the cave," directed Slavatsky, who, though obviously still

shaken, had just as obviously recovered enough to be a very dangerous man. Two of the men grasped the doctor and led him along toward the entrance to the laboratory cave which stood wide open in the gathering daylight. Frink paused long enough to shut the side of the hill and conceal the ship, and then followed the doctor. In the cave the door was shut and the doctor placed against the wall under the window through which he had peered earlier in the night. Slavatsky took his seat at the table, his malignant black eyes boring into the Doctor. Carson and Willis sat on the edge of the operating table, evidently still partially under the effects of the anesthetic that had been administered to them.

"How did you get back here?" demanded Slavatsky.

"Find out!" snapped Dr. Bird.

The dwarf rose threateningly.

"Speak respectfully to me; I am the Master of the World!" he roared in an angry voice. "Answer my questions when I speak, or means will be found to make you answer. How did you get back here?"

Dr. Bird maintained a stubborn silence, his fierce eyes answering the dwarf's, look for look, and his prominent chin jutting out a little more squarely. Carson suddenly broke the silence.

"That's not the Bird we had here earlier," he cried as he staggered to his feet.

"What do you mean?" demanded Slavatsky, whirling on him.

"Look at his hands!" replied Carson pointing.

SLAVATSKY looked at Dr. Bird's long mobile fingers and an evil leer came over his countenance.

"So, Dr. Bird," he said slowly, "you thought to match wits with Ivan Slavatsky, the greatest mind of all the ages. For a time you fooled me when your double was operated on here, but not for long. I presume you thought that we had no way of detecting the substitution? You have discovered differently. Where is your friend, Mr. Carnes?"

"Didn't your men leave him in the cabin when you kidnaped me?"

Slavatsky looked at Frink inquiringly.

"He stayed in the cabin if he was in it when we got there," the leader of the kidnaping gang replied. "He got a full shot of lethane and he's due to be asleep yet. I don't know how this man recovered. I left him there myself."

"Fool!" shrieked Slavatsky. "You brought me a double, a dummy whom I wasted my time in operating on. Was the other a dummy, too?"

"I didn't enter the cabin."

Slavatsky shrugged his shoulders.

"If that is all the good the menthium I have injected has done you, I might as well have saved it. It doesn't matter, however: we have the one we wanted. Dr. Bird, it was very thoughtful of you to come here and offer your marvelous brain to strengthen mine. I have no doubt that you will yield even more menthium than Professor Williams did this evening, especially as I will extract your entire supply and reduce you to permanent idiocy. I will have no mercy on you as I have on the others I have operated on."

Dr. Bird blanched in spite of himself at the ominous words.

"You have the whip-hand for the moment, Slavatsky, but my time may come—and if it does, I will remember your kindness. I saw your operation on Professor Williams this evening and know your power. I also know that you stole the idea and the method from Sweigert of Vienna. I saw you inject the fluid you drew into Willis' brain. Shall I tell what else I saw?"

It was the dwarf's turn to blanch, but he recovered himself quickly.

"Into the chair with him!" he roared.

THREE of the men grasped the doctor and forced him into the chair and Slavatsky started the generator. The violet light bathed Dr.

Bird's head and he felt a stiffness and contraction of his neck muscles, and as he tried to shout out his knowledge of Slavatsky's treachery, he found that his vocal chords were paralyzed. Through a gathering haze he could see Carson approaching with an anesthesia cone and the sweet smell of lethane assailed his nostrils. He fought with all his force, but strong hands held him, and he felt himself slipping—slipping—slipping—and then falling into an immense void. His head slumped forward on his chest and Slavatsky shut off the generator.

"On the table," he said briefly.

Four men picked up the herculean frame of the unconscious doctor and hoisted him up on the table. Carson seized his head and bent it forward and the dwarf took from a case a syringe with a five-inch needle. He touched the point of it to the base of the doctor's brain.

"Slavatsky! Look!" cried Frink.

With an exclamation of impatience the dwarf turned and stared at a disc set on the wall of the cave. It was glowing brightly. With an oath he dropped the syringe and snapped a switch, plunging the cave into darkness. A tiny panel in the door opened to his touch and he stared out into the light.

"Soldiers!" he gasped. "Quick, the back way!"

As he spoke there came a sound as of a heavy body falling at the back of the cave. Slavatsky turned the switch and flooded the cave with light. At the back of the cave stood Operative Carnes, an automatic pistol in his hand.

"Open the main door!" Carnes snapped.

SLAVATSKY made a move toward the light, and Carnes' gun roared deafeningly in the confined space. The heavy bullet smashed into the wall an inch from the dwarf's hand and he started back.

"Open the main door!" ordered Carnes again.

The men stared at one another for a moment and the dwarf's eyes fell.

"Open the door, Frink," he said.

Frink moved over to a lever. He glanced at Slavatsky and a momentary gleam of intelligence passed between them. Frink raised his hand toward the lever and Carnes' gun roared again and Frink's arm fell limp from a smashed shoulder.

"Slavatsky," said Carnes sternly, "come here!"

Slowly the dwarf approached.

"Turn around!" said Carnes.

He turned and felt the cold muzzle of Carnes' gun against the back of his neck.

"Now tell one of your men to open the door," said the detective. "If he promptly obeys your orders, you are safe. If he doesn't, you die."

Slavatsky hesitated for a moment, but the cold muzzle of the automatic bored into the back of his neck and when he spoke it was in a quavering whine.

"Open the door, Carson," he whimpered.

There was a moment of pause.

"If that door isn't open by the time I count three," said Carnes, "—as far as Slavatsky is concerned, it's just too bad. I'll have four shots left—and I'm a dead shot at this range. One! Two!"

His lips framed the word "three" and his fingers were tightening on the trigger when Carson jumped forward with an oath. He pulled a lever on the wall and the door swung open. Carnes shouted and through the opened door came a half dozen marines followed by an officer.

"Tie these men up!" snapped Carnes.

IN a trice the six men were securely bound and Frink's bleeding shoulder was being skilfully treated by two of the marines. Carnes turned his attention to the unconscious doctor.

He rolled him over on his back and began to chafe his hands. An officer in a naval uniform came through the door and with a swift glance around, bent

over Dr. Bird. He raised one of the doctor's eyelids and peered closely at his eye and then sniffed at his breath.

"It's some anesthetic I don't know," he said. "I'll try a stimulant."

He reached in his pocket for a hypodermic, but Carnes interrupted him.

"Earlier in the evening Dr. Bird said they were using lethane," he said.

"Oh, that new gas the Chemical Warfare Service has discovered," said the surgeon. "In that case I guess it'll just have to wear off. I know of nothing that will neutralize it."

Without replying, Carnes began to feverishly search the pockets of the unconscious scientist. With an exclamation of triumph he drew out a bottle and uncorked it. A strong smell as of garlic penetrated the room and he held the opened bottle under Dr. Bird's nose. The doctor lay for a moment without movement, and then he coughed and sat up half strangled with tears running down his face.

"Take that confounded bottle away, Carnes!" he said. "Do you want to strangle me?"

He sat up and looked around.

"What happened?" he demanded. "Oh, yes, I remember now. That brute was about to operate on me. How did you get here?"

"Never mind that, Doctor. Are you all right?"

"Right as a trivet, old dear. How did you get here so opportunely?"

"I was a little slow in locating Lieutenant Maynard and the marines. When we got here I was afraid that we couldn't find the door, so I took Maynard and a detail around to the back and I went up to the top and slid down our cord and looked in the window. You were unconscious and Slavatsky was bending over you with a needle in his hand. I was about to try a shot at him when something called their attention to the men in front and I squeezed through the window and dropped in on them. They didn't seem any too glad to see me, but I overlooked that and insisted on inviting the rest of my friends in to share in the party. That's all."

"Carnes," said the Doctor, "you're probably lying like a trooper when you make out that you did nothing, but I'll pry the truth out of you sooner or later. Now I've got to get to work. Send for Lieutenant Maynard."

ONE of the marines went out to get the flyer, and Dr. Bird stepped to the cabinet from which Slavatsky had taken his record book earlier in the evening and took out the leather-bound volume. He opened it and had started to read when Lieutenant Maynard entered the cave.

"Hello, Maynard," said the Doctor, looking up. "Are the rest of the party on their way?"

"They will be here in less than two hours, Doctor."

"Good enough! Have some one sent to guide them here. In the meanwhile, I'm going to study these records. Keep the prisoners quiet. If they make a noise, gag them. I want to concentrate."

For an hour and a half silence reigned in the cave. A stir was heard outside and Admiral Clay, the President's personal physician, entered leading a stout gray-haired man. Dr. Bird whistled when he saw them and leaped to his feet as another figure followed the admiral.

"The President!" gasped Carnes as the officers came to a salute and the marines presented arms.

The President nodded to his exguard, acknowledged the salute of the rest and turned to Dr. Bird.

"Have you met with success, Doctor?" he asked.

"I have, Mr. President; or, rather, I hope that I have. At the same time, I would rather experiment on some other victim of their deviltry than the one you have brought me."

"My decision that the one I have brought shall be the first to be experimented on, as you term it, is unalterable."

DR. BIRD bowed and turned to the dwarf who had been a sullen witness of what had gone on.

"Slavatsky," he said slowly, "your game is up. I have witnessed one of your brain transfusions and I know the method. I gather from your notes that the menthium you have hidden in that cabinet is still as potent as when it was first extracted from a living brain, but in this case I am going to draw it fresh from one of your gang. Some of the details of the operation are a little hazy to me, but those you will teach me. I am going to restore this man to the condition he was in before you did your devil's work on him and you will direct my movements. Just what is the first step in removing the menthium from a brain?"

The dwarf maintained a stubborn silence.

"You refuse to answer?" asked the Doctor in feigned surprise. "I thought that you would rather instruct me and have me try the operation first on other men. Since you prefer that I operate on you first, I will be glad to do so."

He stepped to the opposite wall and in a few moments had opened the dwarf's hiding place and taken out the flask of menthium.

"Carson," he said, "after you had watched Slavatsky inject menthium into Willis, you took lethane and expected him to inject menthium into your brain. Instead of doing so he withdrew a portion from your brain and put it in this flask. I have reason to believe from his secret records which I found in the cabinet with this flask that he has done so regularly. Are you willing to instruct me while I remove the menthium from him?"

"The dirty swine!" shouted Carson. "I'll do anything to get even with him, but I have never performed the operation. Only Slavatsky and Willis have operated."

"Will you help me, Willis?" asked Dr. Bird.

"I'll be glad to, Doctor. I am sick of this business anyway. At first, Slavatsky just planned to give us abnormally keen brains, but lately he has been talking of setting himself up as Emperor of the World, and I am sick of it. I think I would have broken with him and told all I know, soon, anyway."

"Throw him in that chair," said Dr. Bird.

DESPITE the howlings and struggling of the dwarf, three of the marines strapped him in the chair beneath the tube. The dwarf howled and frothed at the mouth and directed a final appeal for mercy to the President.

"Spare me, Your Excellency," he howled. "I will put my brains at your service and make you the greatest mentality of all time. Together we can conquer and rule the world. I will show you how to build hundreds of ships like mine—"

The President turned his back on the dwarf and spoke curtly.

"Proceed with your experiments, Dr. Bird," he said.

Slavatsky directed his appeals to the doctor, who peremptorily silenced him.

"I told you a few hours ago, Slavatsky, that the time might come when I would remember your threats against me. I will show you the same mercy now as you promised me then. Carnes, put a cone over his face."

Despite the howls of the dwarf, the operative forced an anesthesia cone over his face and Dr. Bird turned to the valve of the lethane cylinder. With Willis directing his movements, he turned on the ray for three minutes and removed the unconscious dwarf to the operating table. He took the long-needled syringe from a case and sterilized it and then turned to the President.

"I am about to operate," he said, "but before I do so, I wish to explain to all just what I have learned and what I am about to do. With that data, the decision of whether I shall proceed will rest with you and Admiral Clay. Have I your permission to do so?"

THE President nodded.

"When I first read of these amnesia cases, I took them for coincidences—until you consulted me and gave me an opportunity to examine one of the victims. I found a small puncture at the base of the brain which I could not explain, and I began to dig into old records. I knew, of course, of Sweigert of Vienna, and the extravagant claims he had put forward in 1911. He was far ahead of his time, but he mixed up some profound scientific discoveries with mysticism and occultism until he was discredited. Nevertheless, he continued his experiments with the aid of his principal assistant, a man named Slavatsky.

"Sweigert's theory was that intellectuality, brain power, intelligence, call it what you will, was the result of the presence of a fluid which he called 'menthium' in the brain. He thought that it could be transferred from one person to another, and with the aid of Slavatsky, he experimented on himself. He removed the menthium from an unfortunate victim, who was reduced to a state of imbecility, and Slavatsky injected the substance into Sweigert's brain. The experiment resulted fatally and Slavatsky was tried for murder. He was acquitted of intentional murder but was imprisoned for a time for manslaughter. He was released when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken up, and for a time I lost track of him.

"I found translations of both the records of the trials and of Sweigert's original reports, and the thing that attracted my attention was that the puncture I found in the victim corresponded exactly with the puncture described by Sweigert as the one he made in extracting the menthium. I asked the immigration authorities to check over their records and they found that a man named Slavatsky whose description corresponded with the ill-fated Sweigert's assistant had entered the United States under Austria's quota about a year ago. The chain of evidence seemed complete to me, and it only remained to find the man who was systematically robbing brains.

"IF such a thing was really going on, I felt that my reputation would make me an attractive bait and I secured a double, as you know, and placed him in a position where his kidnaping would be an easy matter. I was sure that the victims were being taken away by air and that lethane was being used to reduce the neighborhood to a state of profound somnolence, so I hid myself near my double with a gas detector which would find even minute traces of lethane in the air.

"My fish rose to the lure and came after the bait last night. When his ship arrived, I found a strange gas in the air, and followed the ship by the trail of the substance which it left behind it. Carnes was with me, and we got here in time to witness the extraction of the menthium from my friend, Professor Williams of Yale, and to see it injected into one of Slavatsky's gang. I sent Carnes for help and messed around until I was captured myself—and help arrived just in time. That's about all there is to tell. I am now about to reverse the process and try to remove the stolen brains from the criminals and restore them to their rightful owners. I have never operated and the result may be fatal. Shall I proceed?"

The President and Admiral Clay consulted for a moment in undertones.

"Go on with your experiments, Dr. Bird," said the President, "and we will hold you blameless for a failure. You have worked so many miracles in the past that we have every confidence in you."

Dr. Bird bowed acknowledgment to the compliment and bent over the unconscious dwarf. With Willis directing every move, he inserted the needle and drew back slowly on the plunger. Twenty-three and one-half cubic centimeters of amber fluid flowed into the syringe before a speck of blood appeared.

"Enough!" cried Willis. Dr. Bird withdrew the syringe and motioned to Admiral Clay. The man the Admiral had brought in was placed in the chair and lethane administered. He was laid on the table, and, with a silent prayer, Dr. Bird inserted the needle and pressed the plunger. When five and one-quarter centimeters had flowed into the man's brains, he withdrew the needle and held the bottle which Carnes had used to revive him under the man's nose. The patient coughed a moment and sat up.

"Where am I?" he demanded. His gaze roved the cave and fell on the President. "Hello, Robert," he exclaimed. "What has happened?"

WITH a cry of joy the President sprang forward and wrung the hand of the man.

"Are you all right, William?" he asked anxiously. "Do you feel perfectly normal?"

"Of course I do. My neck feels a little stiff. What are you talking about? Why shouldn't I feel normal? How did I get here?"

"Take him outside, Admiral, and explain to him," said the President.

Admiral Clay led the puzzled man outside and the President turned to Dr. Bird.

"Doctor," he said, "I need not tell you that I again add my personal gratitude to the gratitude of a nation which would be yours, could the miracles you work be told off. If there is ever any way that can serve you, either personally or officially, do not hesitate to ask. The other victims will be brought here to-day. Will you be able to restore them?"

"I will, Mr. President. From Slavatsky's records I find that I will have enough if I reduce all of his men to a state of imbecility except Willis. In view of his assistance, I propose to leave him with enough menthium to give him the intelligence of an ordinary schoolboy."

"I quite approve of that," said the President as Willis humbly expressed his gratitude. "Have you had time to make an examination of that ship of Slavatsky's yet?"

"I have not. As soon as the work of restoration is completed, I will go over it, and when I master the principles I will be glad to take them up with the Army-Navy General Board."

"Thank you, Doctor," said the President. He shook hands heartily and left the cave. Carnes turned and looked at the Doctor.

"Will you answer a question, Doctor?" he asked. "Ever since this case started, I have been wondering at your extraordinary powers. You have ordered the army, the navy, the department of justice and everyone else around as though you were an absolute monarch. I know the President was behind you, but what puzzles me is how he came to be so vitally interested in the case."

Dr. Bird smiled quizzically at the detective.

"Even the secret service doesn't know everything," he said. "Evidently you didn't recognize the man whose memory I restored. Besides being one of the most brilliant corporation executives in the country, he has another unique distinction. He happens to be the only brother of the President of the United States."

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CHAPTER I

Out of the Hangman's Hands

"YOU speak," said Von Kettler, jeering, "as if you really believed that you had the power of life and death over me."

The Superintendent of the penitentiary frowned, yet there was something of perplexity in the look he gave the prisoner. "Von Kettler, I think it is time that you dropped this absurd pose of yours," he said, "in view of the fact that you are scheduled to die by hanging at eight o'clock to-morrow night. Your life and death are in your own hands."

Von Kettler bowed ironically. Standing in the

Superintendent's presence in the uniform of the condemned cell, collarless, bare-headed, he yet seemed to dominate the other by a certain poise, breeding, nonchalance.

"Your life is offered you in consideration of your making a complete written confession of the whole ramifications of the plot against the Federal Government," the Superintendent continued.

"Rather a confession of weakness, my dear Superintendent," jeered the prisoner.

"OH don't worry about that! The Government has unravelled a good deal of the conspiracy. It knows that you and your international associates are planning to strike at civilized government throughout the world, in the effort to restore the days of autocracy. It knows you are planning a world federation of states, based on the principles of absolutism and aristocracy. It is aware of the immense financial resources behind the movement. Also that you have obtained the use of certain scientific discoveries

which you believe will aid you in your schemes."

"I was wondering," jeered the prisoner, "how soon you were coming to that."

"They didn't help you in your murderous scheme," the Superintendent thundered. "You were found in the War Office by the night watchman, rifling a safe of valuable documents. You shot him with a pistol equipped with a silencer. You shot down two more who, hearing his cries, rushed to his aid. And you attempted to stroll out of the building, apparently under the belief that you possessed mysterious power which would afford you security."

"A little lapse of judgment such as may happen with the best laid plans," smiled Von Kettler. "No, Superintendent, I'll be franker with you than that. My capture was designed. It was decided to give the Government an object lesson in our power. It was resolved that I should permit myself to be captured, in order to demonstrate that you cannot hang me, that I have merely to open the door of my cell, the gates of this penitentiary, and walk out to freedom."

"Have you quite finished?" rasped the Superintendent.

"At your disposal," smiled the other.

"Here's your last chance, Von Kettler. Your persistence in this absurd claim has actually shaken the expressed conviction of some of the medical examiners that you are sane. If you will make that complete written confession that the Government asks of you, I pledge you that you shall be declared insane to-night, and sent to a sanitarium from which you will be permitted to escape as soon as this affair has blown over."

"THE United States Government has sunk pretty low, to involve itself in a deal of this character, don't you think, my dear Superintendent?" jeered Von Kettler.

"The Government is prepared to act as it thinks best in the interests of humanity. It knows that the death of one wretched murderer such as yourself is not worth the lives of thousands of innocent men!"

"And there," smiled Von Kettler, without abating an atom of his nonchalance, "there, my dear Superintendent, you hit the nail on the head. Only, instead of thousands, you might have said millions."

Von Kettler's aspect changed. Suddenly his eyes blazed, his voice shook with excitement, his face was the face of a fanatic, of a prophet.

"Yes, millions, Superintendent," he thundered. "It is a holy cause that inspires us. We know that it is our sacred mission to save the world from the drabness of modern democracy. The people—always the people! Bah! what are the lives of these swarming millions worth when compared with a Caesar, a Napoleon, an Alexander, a Charlemagne? Nothing can stop us or defeat us. And you, with your confession of defeat, your petty bargaining—I laugh at you!"

"You'll laugh on the gallows tomorrow night!" the Superintendent shouted.

Again Von Kettler was the calm, superior, arrogant prisoner of before. "I shall never stand on the gallows trap, my dear Superintendent, as I have told you many times," he replied. "And, since we have reached what diplomacy calls a deadlock, permit me to return to my cell."

The Superintendent pressed a button on his desk; the guards, who had been waiting outside the office, entered hastily. "Take this man back," he commanded, and Von Kettler, head held high, and smiling, left the room between them.

THE Superintendent pressed another button, and his assistant entered, a rugged, red-haired man of forty—Anstruther, familiarly known as "Bull" Anstruther, the man who had in three weeks reduced the penitentiary

from a place of undisciplined chaos to a model of law and order. Anstruther knew nothing of the Superintendent's offer to Von Kettler, but he knew that the latter had powerful friends outside.

"Anstruther, I'm worried about Von Kettler," said the Superintendent. "He actually laughed at me when I spoke of the possibility of another medical examination. He seemed confident that he could not be hanged. Swore that he will never stand on the gallows trap. How about your precautious for to-morrow night?"

"We've taken all possible precautions," answered Anstruther. "Special armed guards have been posted at every entrance to the building. Detectives are patrolling all streets leading up to it. Every car that passes is being scrutinized, its plate numbers taken, and forwarded to the Motor Bureau. There's no chance of even an attempt at rescue—literally none."

"He's insane," said the Superintendent, with conviction, and the words filled him with new confidence. It had been less Von Kettler's statements than the man's cool confidence and arrogant superiority that had made him doubt. "But he's not too insane to have know what he was doing. He'll hang."

"He certainly will," replied Anstruther. "He's just a big bluff, sir."

"Have him searched rigorously again to-morrow morning, and his cell too—every inch of it, Anstruther. And don't relax an iota of your precautions. I'll be glad when it's all over."

He proceeded to hold a long-distance conversation with Washington over a special wire.

IN his cell, Von Kettler could be be seen reading a book. It was Nietzsche's "Thus Spake Zarathusta," that compendium of aristocratic insolence that once took the world by storm, until the author's mentality was revealed by his commitment to a madhouse. Von Kettler read till midnight, closely observed by the guard at the trap, then laid the work aside with a yawn, lay down on his cot, and appeared to fall instantly asleep.

Dawn broke. Von Kettler rose, breakfasted, smoked the perfecto that came with his ham and eggs, resumed his book. At ten o'clock Bull Anstruther came with a guard and stripped him to the skin, examining every inch of his prison garments. The bedding followed; the cell was gone over microscopically. Von Kettler, permitted to dress again, smiled ironically. That smile stirred Anstruther's gall.

"We know your're just a big bluff, Von Kettler," snarled the big man. "Don't think you've got us going. We're just taking the usual precautions, that's all."

"So unnecessary," smiled Von Kettler. "To-night I shall dine at the Ambassador grill. Watch for me there. I'll leave a memento."

Anstruther went out, choking. Early in the afternoon two guards came for Von Kettler.

"Your sister's come to say good-by to you," he was told, as he was taken to the visitors' cell.

This was a large and fairly comfortable cell in a corridor leading off the death house, designed to impress visitors with the belief that it was the condemned man's permanent abode; and, by a sort of convention, it was understood that prisoners were not to disabuse their visitors' minds of the idea. The convention had been honorably kept. The visitor's approach was checked by a grill, with a two-yards space between it and the bars of the cell. Within this space a guard was seated; it was his duty to see that nothing passed.

AS soon as Von Kettler had been temporarily established in his new quarters, a pretty, fair-haired young woman came along the corridor, conducted by the Superintendent himself. She walked with dignity, her bearing was proud, she smiled at her

brother through the grill, and there was no trace of weeping about her eyes.

She bowed with pretty formality, and Von Kettler saluted her with an airy wave of the hand. Then they began to speak, and the German guard who had been selected for the purpose of interpreting to the Superintendent afterward, was baffled.

It was not German—neither was it Franch, Italian, or any of the Romance languages. As a matter of fact, it was Hungarian.

Not until the half-hour was up did they lapse into English, and all the while they might have been conversing on art, literature, or sport. There was no hint of tragedy in this last meeting.

"Good-by, Rudy," smiled his sister. "I'll see you soon."

"To-night or to-morrow," replied Von Kettler indifferently.

The girl blew him a kiss. She seemed to detach it from her mouth and extend it through the grill with a graceful gesture of the hand, and Von Kettler caught it with a romantic wave of the fingers and strained it to his heart. But it was only one of those queer foreign ways. Nothing was passed. The alert guard, sitting under the electric light, was sure of that.

They searched Von Kettler again after he was back in the death house. The other cells were empty. In three of them detectives were placed. In the yard beyond the hangman was experimenting with the trap. He himself was under close observation. Nothing was being left to chance.

AT seven o'clock two men collided in the death-house entrance. One was a guard, carrying Von Kettler's last meal on a tray. He had demanded Perigord truffles and paté de foie gras, cold lobster, endive salad, and near-beer, and he had got them. The other was the chaplain, in a state of visible agitation.

"If he was an atheist and mocked at me it wouldn't be so bad," the good man declared. "I've had plenty of that kind. But he says he's not going to be hanged. He's mad, mad as a March hare. The Government has no right to send an insane man to the gallows."

"All bluff, my dear Mr. Wright," answered the Superintendent, when the chaplain voiced his protest. "He thinks he can get away with it. The commission has pronounced him sane, and he must pay the penalty of his crime."

By that mysterious process of telegraphy that exists in all penal institutionss Von Kettler's boast that he would beat the hangman had become the common information of the inmates. Bets were being laid, and the odds against Von Kettler ranged from ten to fifteen to one. It was generally agreed, however, that Von Kettler would die game to the last.

"You all ready, Mr. Squires?" the prowling Superintendent asked the hangman.

"Everything's O. K., sir."

The Superintendent glanced at the group of newspaper men gathered about the gallows. They, too, had heard of the prisoner's boast. One of them asked him a question. He silenced him with an angry look.

"The prisoner is in his cell, and will be led out in ten minutes. You shall see for yourselves how much truth there is in this absurdity," he said.

HE looked at his watch. It lacked five minutes of eight. The preparations for an execution had been reduced almost to a formula. One minute in the cell, twenty seconds to the trap, forty seconds for the hangman to complete his arrangements; two minutes, and then the thud of the false floor.

Four minutes of eight. The little group had fallen silent. The hangman furtively took a drink from his hip-pocket flask. Three minutes! The Superintendent walked back to the

door of the death house and nodded to the guard.

"Bring him out quick!" he said.

The guard shot the bolt of Von Kettler's cell. The Superintendent saw him enter, heard a loud exclamation, and hurried to his side. One glance told him that the prisoner had made good his boast.

Von Kettler's cell was empty!

CHAPTER II

Conference

CAPTAIN RICHARD RENNELL, of the U. S. Air Service, but temporarily detached to Intelligence, thought that Fredegonde Valmy had never looked so lovely as when he helped her out of the cockpit.

Her dark hair fell in disorder over her flushed cheeks, and her eyes were sparkling with pleasure.

"A thousand thanks, M'sieur Rennell," she said, in her low voice with its slight foreign intonation. "Never have I enjoyed a ride more than today. And I shall see you at Mrs. Wansleigh's ball to-night?"

"I hope so—if I'm not wanted at Headquarters," answered Dick, looking at the girl in undisguised admiration.

"Ah, that Headquarters of yours! It claims so much of your time!" she pouted. "But these are times when the Intelligence Service demands much of its men, is it not so?"

"Who told you I was attached to Intelligence?" demanded Dick bluntly.

She laughed mockingly. "Do you think that is not known all over Washington?" she asked. "It is strange that Intelligence should act like the—the ostrich, who buries his head in the sand and thinks that no one sees him because it is hidden."

Dick looked at the girl in perplexity. During the past month he had completely lost his head and heart over her, and he was trying to view her with the dispassionate judgment that his position demanded.

As the niece of the Slovakian Ambassador, Mademoiselle Valmy had the entry to Washington society. The Ambassador was away on leave, and she had appeared during his absence, but she had been accepted unquestionably at the Embassy, where she had taken up her quarters, explaining—as the Ambassador confirmed by cable—that she had sailed under a misconception as to the date of his leave.

BRUNETTE, beautiful, charming, she had a score of hearts to play with, and yet Dick flattered himself that he stood first. Perhaps the others did too.

"Of course," the girl went on, "with the Invisible Emperor threatening organized society, you gentlemen find yourselves extremely busy. Well, let us hope that you locate him and bring him to book."

"Sometimes," said Dick slowly, "I almost thing that you know something about the Invisible Emperor."

Again she laughed merrily. "Now, if you had said that my sympathies were with the Invisible Emperor, I might have been surprised into an acknowledgment," she answered. "After all, he does stand for that aristocracy that has disappeared from the modern world, does he not? For refinement of manners, for beauty of life, for all those things men used to prize."

"Likewise for the existence of the vast body of the nation in ignorance and poverty, in filth and squalor," answered Dick. "No, my sympathies are with law and order and democracy, and your Invisible Emperor and his crowd are simply a gang of thieves and hold-up men."

"Be careful!" A warning fire burned in the girl's eyes. "At least, it is known that the Emperor's ears are long."

"So are a jackass's," retorted Dick.

He was sorry next moment, for the girl received his answer in icy silence. In his car, which conveyed them from the tarmac to the Embassy, she received all his overtures in the same si-

lence. A frigid little bow was her farewell to him, while Dick, struggling between resentment and humiliation, sat dumb and wretched at the wheel.

Yet the idea that Fredegonde Valmy had any knowledge of the conspiracy or its leaders never entered Dick's head. He was only miserable that he had offended her, and he would have done anything to have straightened out the trouble.

IT seemed impossible that in the year 1940 the peace of the civilized world could be threatened by an international conspiracy, bent on restoring absolutism, and yet each day showed more clearly the immense ramifications of the plot. Each day, too, brought home to the investigating governments more clearly the fact that the things they had discovered were few in number in comparison with those they had not.

The headquarters of the conspirators had never been discovered, and it was suspected that the powerful mind behind them was intentionally leading the investigators along false trails.

The conspiracy was world-wide. It had been behind the revolution that had recreated an absolutist monarchy in Spain. It had plunged Italy into civil war. It had thrown England into the convulsions of a succession of general strikes, using the communist movement as a cloak for its activities.

But nobody dreamed that America could become a fertile field for its insidious propaganda. Yet it was behind the millions of adherents of the so-called Freemen's Party, clamoring for the destruction of the constitution. Upon the anarchy that would follow the absolutist régime was to be erected.

Already the mysterious powers had struck. Departments of State had been entered and important papers abstracted. The *Germania* had mysteriously disappeared in mid-Atlantic, and a shipping panic had ensued. There were tales of mysterious figures materializing out of nothingness. It was known that the conspirators were in possession of certain chemical and electrical devices with which they hoped to achieve their ends.

The Superintendent of the penitentiary had had in his pocket an authorization to stop the execution of Von Kettler after he stood on the trap. Dead, he would be a mere mark of vengeance; alive, he might be persuaded to furnish some clue to the headquarters of the miscreants.

AND behind the conspirators loomed the unknown figure that signed itself the Invisible Emperor—in the communications that poured in to the White House and to the rulers of other nations. In the threats that were materializing with stunning swiftness.

Who was he? Rumor said that a former European ruler had not died, as was supposed; that a coffin weighted with lead had been buried, and that he himself in his old age, had gone forth to a mad scheme of world conquest with a body of his nobles.

It had been practically a state of war since the shipment of gold, guarded by a detachment of police, had been stolen in broad daylight outside Baltimore, the police clubbed and killed by invisible assailants—as they claimed. The press was under censorship, troops under arms, and it was reported that the fleet was mobilizing.

In the midst of it all, Washington shopped, danced, feasted, flirted, like a swarm of may flies over a treacherous stream.

Intelligence was alert. As Dick started to drive away from the Slovakian Embassy, a man stepped quickly to the side of the car and thrust an envelope into his hand. Dick opened it quickly. He was wanted by Colonel Stopford at once, not at the camouflaged Headquarters at the War Department, but at the real Headquarwhere no papers were kept but weighty decisions were made. And to that de-

vious course the Government had already been driven.

Dick parked his car in a side street—it would have been under espionage in any of the official parking places—and set off at a smart walk toward his destination. Nobody would have guessed, from the appearance of the streets, that a national calamity was impending. The shopping crowds were swarming along the sidewalks, cars tailed each other through the streets; only a detachment of soldiers on the White House lawn lent a touch of the martial to the scene.

THE building which Dick entered was an ordinary ten-story one in the business section; the various legal firms and commercial concerns that occupied it would have been greatly surprised to have known the identity of the Ira T. Graves, Importer, whose name appeared in modest letters upon the opaque glass door on the seventh story. Inside a flapper stenographer—actually one of the most trusted members of Intelligence's staff—asked Dick's name, which she knew perfectly well. Not a smile or a flicker of an eyelid betrayed the fact.

"Mr. Rennell," said Dick with equal gravity.

The girl passed into an inner room, and a buzzer sounded. In a few moments the girl came back.

"Mr. Graves will be here in a few minutes, Mr. Rennell, if you'll kindly wait in his office," she said.

Dick thanked her, and walked through into the empty office. He waited there till the girl had closed the door behind him, then went out by another door and found himself again in the corridor. Opposite him was a door with the words "Entrance 769" and a hand pointing down the corridor to where the Intelligence service had established another perfectly innocent front. Dick tapped lightly at this door, and a key turned in the lock.

The man who stepped quickly back was one of the heads of the Civil Service. The man at the flat-topped desk was Colonel Stopford. The man on a chair beside him was one of the heads of the police force.

THE Colonel, a big, elderly man, dressed in a grey sack suit, checked Dick's commencing salutation. "Never mind etiquette, Rennell," he said. "Sit down. You've heard about the man Von Kettler's escape last night, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's known, then. We can't keep things dark. He vanished from his cell in the death house, three minutes before the time appointed for his execution, though, as a matter of fact, he wasn't going to be hanged. Apparently he walked through the walls.

"There's a sequel to it, Rennell. It seems he had told the assistant-superintendent, a man named Anstruther, that he'd meet him at a restaurant in town that night. He promised to leave him a memento. Anstruther happened to remember this boast of Von Kettler's, and he surrounded the restaurant with armed detectives, on the chance that the fellow would show up. Rennell, *Von Kettler was there!*"

"He went to this restaurant, sir?"

"He walked in, just before the place was surrounded, engaged a table, and ordered a sumptuous meal. He told the waiter his name, said he expected a friend to join him, walked into the wash-room—and vanished! Two minutes later Anstruther and his men were on the job. Von Kettler never came out of the washroom, so far as anybody knows.

"In the midst of the hue and cry somebody pointed to the table that Von Kettler had engaged. There was a twenty-dollar bill upon it, and a scrap of paper reading, 'I've kept my word. Von K.'"

Colonel Stopford looked at Dick fixedly. "Rennell, we may be fools," he said, "but we realize what we're up against. It's a big thing, and we're

going to need all our fighting grit to overcome it. You're one of the four men we're depending on. We're counting on you because of your record, and because of your degree in science at Heidelberg. The President wishes you to take charge of the whole Eastern Intelligence District, covering the entire south-eastern seaboard of the United States. You are to have complete freedom of action, and all civil, military, and naval officials have received instructions to co-operate with you."

"There goes Mrs. Wansleigh's ball," thought Dick, but he said nothing.

"WE'RE not the hunters, Dick Rennell," went on Colonel Stopford. "We're hiding under cover, and I'm counting on you to turn the tables. They even know my office is here. I had a long distance call from Savannah this morning in mocking vein. They advised me to have the White House watched to-night. I warned the President, and we've posted guards all round it."

"They held the wire while you called up the President?" asked Dick.

"Damn it, no! They called me up from Scranton the instant he'd finished speaking. They have the power of the devil, Rennell, with that infernal invisibility invention of theirs. Rennell, we're fighting unknown forces. Who this Invisible Emperor is, we don't even know. But one thing we've found out. He has his headquarters somewhere in your district. Somewhere along the south Atlantic seaboard. The greater part of his activities emanate from there. But we're fighting in the dark. The clue, the master clue that will enable us to locate him—that's what we lack."

The sun had set, it was beginning to grow dark. Colonel Stopford switched on the electric lamp beside his desk.

"What have you to say, Rennell?" he asked; and Dick was aware that the two other men were regarding him attentively.

"It's evident," said Dick, "that Von Kettrell possessed this means of invisibility in his cell, and wasn't detected. He simply slipped out when the guard came to fetch him."

"Invisibility? Yes! But invisible's not the same thing as transparent," cried Stopford. "These folks have operated in broad daylight. They're transparent, damn them! Not even a shadow! You know what I mean, Rennell! What I'm thinking of! That crazy man you were in touch with six months ago, who prophesied this! We turned him down! He showed me a watch and said the salvation of the world was inside the case! I thought him insane!"

"YOU mean Luke Evans, sir. That watch was his pocket model. He went off in a huff, saying the time would come when we'd want him and not be able to find him."

"But, damn him, he wanted to produced universal darkness, or some such nonsense, Rennell, and I told him that we wanted light, no darkness."

"It wasn't exactly that, sir." Colonel Stopford was a man of the old school; he had been an artillery officer in the Great War, and was characteristically impatient of new notions. Dick began carefully: "You'll remember, sir, old Evans claimed to have been the inventor of that shadow-breaking device that was stolen from him and sold in England."

"To a moving picture company!" snorted Stopford. "I asked him what moving pictures had to do with war."

"Evans was convinced that the invention would be applied to war. He claimed that it made the modern methods of military camouflage out of date completely. He said that by destroying shadows one could produce invisibility, since visibility consists in the refraction of wave lengths by material objects.

"When they stole his invention, he foresaw that it would be used in war. He set to work to nullify his own in-

vention. He told me that he had unintentionally given to the enemies of the United States a means of bringing us to our knees, since he believed that British motion picture company was actually a subsidiary of Krupp's. He worked out a method of counteracting it."

"You must get him, Rennell. Even if it's all nonsense, we can't afford to let any chance go. If Evans's invention will counteract this damned invisibility business—"

The telephone on the Colonel's desk rang. He picked it up, and his face assumed an expression of incredulity. He looked about him, like a man bewildered. He beckoned to the police official, who hurried to his side, and thrust the receiver into his hand. The official listened.

"All right," he said. He turned to Dick and the Civil Service representative.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the President has disappeared from his office in the White House, and there are grave fears that he has been kidnapped!"

CHAPTER III

In the White House

COLONEL STOPFORD'S car had been parked around the corner of the building, and within a minute the four men were inside it, Stopford at the wheel, and racing in the direction of the White House. A nod to the guard at the gate, and they were inside the grounds. At the entrance a single guard, in place of the four who should have been posted there, challenged sharply, and attempted to bar the way, not recognizing Dick or Stopford in their civilian clothes.

"Where's your officer?" demanded Stopford sharply.

Half-cowed by the Colonel's manner, the young recruit hesitated, and the four swept him out of the way and hurried on. The scene outside the main entrance to the White House was one of indescribable confusion. Soldiers were swarming in confused groups, some trying to force an entrance, others pouring out. Every moment civilians, streaming over the lawn, added to the number. Discipline seemed almost abandoned. From inside the building came outbursts of screams and cursing, the scuffling of a mob.

"Roscoe! Roscoe!" shouted Stopford. "Where's the President's secretary? Who's seen him? Let us pass immediately!"

No one paid the least attention to him. But a short, bare-headed civilian, who was struggling in the crowd, heard, and shouted in answer, waved his arms, and began to force his way toward the four. It was Roscoe, the secretary of President Hargreaves. The President was a childless widower, and Roscoe lived in the White House with him and was intimately in his confidence.

Rosecoe gained Stopford's side. "Say—they've got him!" he panted. "They've got him somewhere—inside the building. They're trying to get him out! We've got to save him—but we can't see them—or him. They've made him invisible too, curse them! I heard him crying, 'Help me, Roscoe!' He saw me, I tell you—and I didn't know where he was!"

THE little secretary was almost incoherent with fear and anger. The five men, forming a wedge, hurled themselves forward. Out of the White House entrance appeared a tall officer, revolver in hand. It was Colonel Simpson, of the President's staff. Half beside himself, he swept the weapon menacingly about him, shouting incoherently, and clearing a passage, into which the five hurled themselves.

Stopford seized his revolver hand, and after a brief struggle Simpson recognized him.

"He's in the building!" he shouted wildly. "Somewhere upstairs! I'm trying to form a cordon, but this damned mob's in the way. Kick those

civilians out!" he cried to the soldiers. "Shoot them if they don't go! Guard the windows!"

Stopford and Dick, at the head of the wedge, pushed past into the White House. The interior was packed, men were struggling frantically on the staircase; it seemed hopeless to try to do anything.

Suddenly renewed yells sounded from above, a scream of anguish, howls of terror. There came a downward surge, then a forward and upward one, which carried the two men up the stairs and into the President's private apartments above.

In the large reception-room a mob was struggling at a window, beneath a blaze of electric light. A soldier was standing there like a statue, his face fixed with a leer of horror. In his hands was a rifle, with a bloodstained bayonet, dripping upon the hardwood floor at the edge of the rug. Upon the rug itself a stream of blood was spouting out of the air.

Dick looked at the sight and choked. There was something appalling in the sight; it was the quintessence of horror, that widening pool of blood, staining the rug, and flowing from an invisible body that writhed and twisted, while moans of anguish came from unseen lips.

Colonel Stopford leaped back, livid and staring. "God, it's got eyes—two eyes!" he shouted.

Dick saw them too. The eyes, which alone were visible, were about six inches from the floor, and they were appearing and disappearing, as they opened and shut alternately. It was a man lying there, a dying man, pierced by the soldier's bayonet by pure accident, dying and yet invisible.

THE mob had scattered with shrieks of terror, but a few bolder spirits remained in a thin circle about that fearful thing on the rug. Dick bent over the man, and felt the outlines of the writhing body. It was a man, apparently dressed in some sort of uniform, but this was covered, from the top of the head to the feet, with a sort of sheer silken garment, bifurcating below the waist, and resembling a cocoon. It seemed to appear and alternately to vanish.

Dick seized the filmly stuff in his fingers, rent it, and stripped it away. Yells of terror and amazement broke from the throats of all. Instantly the thin circle of spectators had become reinforced by a struggling mass of men.

The half-visible cocoon clung to Dick's body like spider webs. But the man who had been wearing it had sprung instantly into view beneath the cluster of electric lights. He was a fair-haired young fellow of about thirty years, his features white and set in the agony of death.

He was dressed in a trim uniform of black, with silver braid, and on his shoulders were the insignia of a lieutenant. He opened his eyes, blue as the skies, and stared about him. He seemed to understand what had happened to him.

"Dogs!" he muttered.

Shrieks of fury answered him. The mob surged toward him as if to grind his face to pieces under their feet—and then recoiled, mouthing and gibbering. But it was at Dick that they were looking, not at the dying man.

He raised himself upon one elbow with a mighty effort. "His Majesty the Invisible Emperor! Long be his reign triumphant!" he chanted. It was his last credo. The words broke from his lips accompanied by a torrent of red foam. His head dropped back, his body slipped down; he was gone. And no one seemed to observe his passing. They were all screaming and gibbering at Dick.

"Rennell! Rennell!" yelled Stopford. "Where are you, Rennell? God, man, what's happened to your legs?"

DICK looked down at himself. For a moment he had the illusion that he was a head and a trunk, floating in the air. His lower limbs had be-

come invisible, except for patches of trousering that seemed to drift through space. The mob in the room had fallen back gaping at him in horror.

Then Dick understood. It was the invisible garment that had coiled itself about him. He tore it from him and became visibly a man once more.

Shouts from another room! A surging movement of the crowd toward it. The muffled sounds of an automatic pistol, fitted with a silencer! Then screams:

"The devils are in there! They're murdering the soldiers!"

There followed a panic-stricken rush, more muffled firing, and then the sharp roar of rifles, and the fall of plaster. Some one was bawling the President's name. The rooms became a mass of milling human beings, lost to all self-control.

A bedlam of noise and struggle. Men fought with one another blindly, cursing soldiers fired promiscuously among the mob, riddling the walls, stabbing at the air. The plaster was falling in great chunks everywhere, filling the rooms with a heavy white cloud, in which all choked and struggled. The yells of the civilian mob below, struggling helplessly in the packed crowd that wedged the great stairway, made babel. Outside the White House a dense mob that filled the lawns was yelling back, and struggling to gain admittance. Suddenly the lights went out.

"They've cut the wires!" rose a wild, wailing voice. "The devils have cut the wires! Kill them! Kill everybody!"

His cry ended in a gurgle. Somewhere in that dark hell a struggle was going on, a well defined struggle, different from the random, aimless battling of the half-crazed soldiers and the civilians. President Hargreaves was still within the walls of the White House, it was known; it was physically impossible for him to have been carried away when every foot of space was packed. And through that darkness the invisible assailants were edging him, foot by foot, toward the outside.

DICK was on the edge of this silent battle. He sensed it. Bracing himself against a bureau, while the mob surged past him, he tried to pierce the gloom, to reinforce with his perceptions what his instinct told him. A soldier, crazed with fear, came leaping at him, bayonet leveled. He thrust with a grunt. Dick avoided the glancing steel by a hand's breadth, and, as the impetus of the man's attack carried him forward, caught him beneath the chin with a stiff right-hand jolt that sent him sprawling.

From below the cries broke out again, with renewed violence: "They've got the President! Get them! Get them! Close all doors and windows!"

But a door went crashing down somewhere, to the tune of savage yells. The mob was pouring down the stairs. It was growing less packed above. Dick heard Stopford's voice calling his name.

"Here, sir" he shouted back, and the two men collided.

"For God's sake do what you can, Rennell!" shouted the Colonel. They've got the President downstairs. They had him in this very room, in the thick of it all. I heard him cry out, as if under a gag. They put one of those damned cloths over him. God, Rennell, I'm going crazy!"

The upper floor of the White House was almost empty now. Dick thrust himself into the crowd that still jammed the stairs. He reached the ground floor. It was lighter here, but a glance showed him that it was impossible to attempt to restore any semblance of order. The big East Room was jammed with a fighting, cursing throng. Dick stumbled over the bodies of those who had fallen in the press, or had been shot down. Outside the mob was thickening, swarming through the grounds and screeching like madmen.

NOTHING that could be done! Dick found himself caught once more in the human torrent. Presently he was wedged up against a broken window. He precipitated himself through the frame, dropped to the ground, stopped for an instant to catch breath.

The yelling mob was congregated about the main entrance of the White House, and on this side the grounds were comparatively empty. As Dick stopped, trying desperately to form some plan of action, he heard footsteps and low voices near him. Then two men came toward him, followed by three or four others.

The men—but, though the light was faint, Dick realized instantly that they were wearing invisible garments. He could see nothing of them; he could see through where they seemed to be—the trees, the buildings of the streets. Yet they were at his elbow. And they saw him. He heard one of them leap, and sprang aside as the butt of a pistol descended through the air and dropped where his head had been.

Yet no hand had seemed to hold it. It had been a pistol, reversed, and flashing downward, to be arrested in mid-air six inches from his face. But the men were not wholly invisible. Nearly six feet above the ground, three or four pairs of eyes were staring malevolently into Dick's. Only the eyes were there.

The two foremost men were breathing heavily. They were carrying something. Grotesquely through a rent in the invisible garment Dick saw a patch of trouser. He heard a muffled sigh. President Hargreaves, in the hands of his abductors!

Dick's actions were reflex. As the pistol hung beside his face, he snatched at it, wrested it away, struck with it, and heard a curse and felt the yielding impact of bone and flesh. He had missed the head but struck the shoulder. Next moment hands gripped the weapon, and a desperate struggle began.

IT was torn from Dick's grasp. He struck out at random, and his fist collided wirh the chin of a substantial flesh and blood human being. Invisible arms grasped him. He fought free. The pistol slashed his face sidewise, the sight ripping a strip of flesh from the cheek. He was surrounded, he was being beaten down, though he was fighting gamely.

"Kill the swine! Shoot! Shoot!" Dick heard one of his assailants muttering.

Out of the void appeared the blue muzzle of another automatic, with a silencer on it. Dick ducked as a flame spurted from it. He felt the bullet stir his hair. He grasped at the hand that held it, and missed. Then he was held fast, and the muzzle swung impracably toward his head again. Helpless, he watched it describe that arc of death. It was only later that he wondered why he had fought all the while in silence, instead of crying for help.

But of a sudden the pistol was dashed aside. A woman's voice spoke peremptorily, in some language Dick did not understand. And he saw her eyes among the eyes that glared at him. Dark eyes that he knew, even if the voice had not revealed her identity. The eyes and voice of Fredegonde Valmy!

Dick cried her name. He put forth all his strength in a final struggle. Suddenly he felt a stunning impact on the back of the head. He slipped, reeled, threw out his hands, and sank down unconscious on the grass at the side of the path.

CHAPTER IV

The Invisible Ambassador

FREDEGONDE VALMY implicated in the conspiracy! That was the first thought that flashed into Dick's mind as he recovered consciousness. He might have suspected it! But the idea that the girl he loved was bound up with the murderous gang that was attacking the very founda-

tions of civilization chilled him to the soul.

Dick had been picked up a few minutes after he had been struck down, identified by Colonel Stopford as he was about to be removed to a hospital, and carried into the White House. Order had been restored by the arrival of a detachment of troops from Fort Myers, the severed cables located and mended, and by midnight the interior of the Presidential home had been made habitable again.

President Hargreaves was gone—kidnapped despite the utmost efforts to protect him; and it was impossible to conceal that fact from the world. But the wheels of government still revolved. All night an emergency council sat in the White House, and, deciding that in a time of such grave danger heroic means must be adopted, with the consent of such of the Congressional leaders as could be summoned, a Council of Defence was organized.

The whole country east of the Mississippi was placed under martial law. The fleet and army were put on a war footing. Flights of airplanes were assembled at numerous points along the eastern seaboard. To this Council Donald was attached as head of Intelligence for the Eastern Division. Yet all this availed little unless the location of the Invisible Empire could be ascertained, and, despite telegraphic reports that came in hourly, alleging to have discovered its headquarters, nothing had been achieved in this direction.

THE garment taken from the slain soldier had been examined by a half-dozen of the leading chemists of the East. Pending the arrival from New York of the celebrated Professor Hosmeyer, it was deposited under military guard in a dark closet. The result was unfortunate. The garment exhibited to the assembled scientists was a mere bifurcated silken bag.

The gas with which it had been impregnated, though it had been heavy enough to adhere to the fabric for hours, had also been volatile enough to have disappeared completely, leaving a residue which was identified as a magnesium isotope.

Equally spectacular had been the disappearance of Mademoiselle Fredegonde Valmy. A cable from the Slovakian Ambassador had arrived a few hours later, denying her authenticity. And with her disappearance came the discovery that she had been at the head of an espionage system with ramifications in every state department, and in every statesman's home.

Three days passed with no sign from the enemy. The Council sat all day. In the executive offices of the White House Dick toiled ceaselessly, planning, receiving reports, organizing the flights of airplanes at strategic points throughout his district. From time to time he would be summoned to the Council. At night he threw himself upon a cot in his office and slept a sleep broken by the constant arrival of messengers. And still there was no clue to the location of the headquarters of the marauders.

But in those three days there had been no sign of them. Hope had succeeded despair; in the rebound of confidence the populace was beginning to ridicule the nation-wide precautions against what were coming to be considered merely a gang of super-criminals. It was even whispered that President Hargreaves had not been kidnapped at all. The Freemen's Party accused the Government of a plot to subvert popular liberties.

DICK received a summons on the third evening. Utterly worn out with his work, he pulled himself together and made his way into the Blue Room, where the Council was assembled. Vice-president Tomlinson, an elderly man, was in the chair. A nonentity, pushed into a post it had been thought he would adorn innocuously, he had been overwhelmed by his succession to the chief office of State.

Tomlinson did not like Dick, or any of the hustling younger officers who, unlike himself, realized the real significance of the danger that overhung the country. He sat pompously in his leather chair, regarding Dick as he entered in obedience to the summons.

"Well, Captain Rennell, what have you to report to us this evening?" he inquired, as Dick saluted and stood to attention at the table.

"We're improving our concentratrons, Mr. Vice-president. We've eight flights of seaplanes scouring the coast in the hope of locating the stronghold of the Invisible Emperor. We've—"

"I'm sick and tired of that title," shouted Tomlinson. He sprang to his feet, his face flushed with anger. His nerves had broken under the continuous strain. "I'll give you my opinion, Captain Rennell," he said. "And that is that this so-called Invisible Emperor is a myth.

"A gang of thieves has invented a paint that renders them inconspicuous, has created a panic, and is taking advantage of it to terrorize the country. The whole business is poppycock, in my opinion, and the sooner this bubble bursts the better. Well, sir, what have you to say to that?"

"Have you ever seen any of these men in their invisible clothing, if I may ask, Mr. Vice-president?" inquired Dick, trying to keep down his anger. His nerves, too, were badly frazzled.

"No, sir, I have not, but my opinion is that this story is grossly exaggerated, and that the persons responsible are the reporters of our sensational press!" thundered Tomlinson.

HE looked about him, a weak man proud of having asserted his authority. Somebody laughed.

Tomlinson glared at Dick, his rubicund visage purpling. But it was not Dick who had laughed. Nor any one at the council table.

That laugh had come from the wall beside the door. Again it broke forth, high-pitched, cold, derisive. All heads turned as if upon pivots to see who had uttered it.

"Good God!" exclaimed Secretary Norris, of the War Department, and slumped in his chair.

Five feet eight inches from the floor a pair of grey eyes looked at the Council members out of emptiness. Grey eyes, a man's eyes, cool, contemptuous, and filled with authority, with a contemptuous sense of superiority that left every man there dumb.

Dick was the first to recover himself. He stepped forward, not to where the invisible man was standing, but to a point between him and the door.

That cold laugh broke forth again. "Gentlemen, I am an ambassador from my sovereign, who chooses to be known as the Invisible Emperor," came the words. "As such, I claim immunity. Not that I greatly care, should you wish to violate the laws of nations and put me to death. But, believe me, in such case the retribution will be a terrible one."

Suddenly the envoy peeled off the gas-impregnated garments that covered him. He stood before the Council, a fair-haired young man, clad in the same fashion of trim black uniform as the bayonetted soldier had worn upstairs three nights before.

He bowed disdainfully, and it was Tomlinson who shouted:

"Arrest that man! I know his face! I've seen it in the papers. He's Von Kettler, the murderer who escaped from jail in an invisible suit."

"Oh, come, Mr. Vice-president," laughed Von Kettler, "are you sure this isn't all very much exaggerated?"

Tomlinson sank back in his chair, his ruddy face covered with sweat. Dick stared at Von Kettler. A suspicion was forming in his mind. He had seen eyes like those before, dark instead of grey, and yet with the same look of pride and breeding in them; the look of the face, too, impossible to mistake—he knew!

Fredegonde Valmy was Von Kettler's sister!

"WELL, gentlemen, am I to receive the courtesies of an ambassador?" inquired Van Kettler, advancing.

"You shall have the privileges of the gallows rope!" shouted Tomlinson. "Arrest that man at once, Captain Rennell!"

"Pardon me, Mr. Vice-president," suggested the Secretary for the Navy blandly, "but perhaps it would be more desirable to hear what he has to say."

"Immunity for thieves, robbers, murderers!"

"Might I suggest," said Von Kettler suavely, "that, since the United States has honored my master by placing itself upon a war footing, it has accorded him the rights of a beligerent?"

"We'll hear you, Mr. Von Kettler," said the Secretary of State, glancing along the table. Three or four nodded, two shook their heads; Tomlinson only glared speechlessly at the intruder. Von Kettler advanced to the table and laid a paper upon it.

"You recognize that signature, gentlemen?" he asked.

At the bottom of the paper Dick saw scrawled the bold and unmistakable signature of President Hargreaves.

"An order signed by the President of your country," purred Von Kettler, "ordering your military forces replaced upon a peace footing, and the acceptance of our conditions. They are not onerous, and will not interfere with the daily life of the country. Merely a little change in that outworn document, the Constitution. My master rules America henceforward."

Somebody laughed; another laughed; but it was the Secretary of State who did the fine thing. He took up the paper bearing what purported to be President Hargreaves's signature, and tore it in two.

"The people of this country are her rulers," he said, "not an old man dragooned into signing a proclamation while in captivity—if indeed that is President Hargreaves's signature."

THERE came a sudden burst of applause. Von Kettler's face became the mask of a savage beast. He shook his fist furiously.

"You call my master a forger?" he shouted. "You yourselves repudiate your own Constitution, which places the control of army and navy in the hands of your President? You refuse to honor his signature?"

"Listen to me, Mr. Von Kettler!" The voice of the Secretary of State cut like a steel edge. "You totally mistake the temper of the people of this country. We don't surrender, even to worthy adversaries, much less to a gang of common thieves, murderers, and criminals like yourselves. You have been accorded the privilege you sought, that of an envoy, and that was straining the point. Show yourself here again after two minutes have elapsed, and you'll go to the gallows—for keeps."

"Dogs!" shouted Von Kettler, beside himself with fury. "Your doom is upon you even at this moment. I have but to wave my arm, and Washington shall be destroyed, and with her a score of other cities. I tell you you are at our mercy. Thousands of lives shall pay for this insult to my master. I warn you, such a catastrophe is coming as shall show you the Invisible Emperor does not threaten in vain!"

With complete nonchalence the Secretary of State took out his watch. "One minute and fifteen seconds remaining, Captain Rennell," he said. "At the expiration of that time, put Mr. Von Kettler under arrest. I advise you to go back to your master quickly, Mr. Von Kettler," he added, "and tell him that we'll have no dealings with him, now or ever."

FOR a moment longer Von Kettler stood glaring; then, with a laugh of derision and a gesture of the hands he vanished from view. And, though they might have expected that dénouement, the members of the Council leaped to their feet, staring incredu-

lously at the place where he had been. Nothing of Von Kettler was visible, not even the eyes, and there sounded not the slightest footfall.

Dick sprang forward to the door, but his outstretched arms encountered only emptiness. In spite of the Secretary of State's instructions, he was almost minded to apprehend the man. If he could get him!

The corridor was empty. A guard of soldiers was at the entrance, but they did not block the entrance. Even now Von Kettler might be passing them! Why didn't his feet sound upon the floor? How could a bulky man glide so smoothly?

Perhaps because Dick was undecided what to do, Von Kettler escaped him. By the time he reached the guards he knew he had escaped. Suddenly there came an unexpected dénouement. Somewhere on the White House lawn a guard challenged, fired. The snap of one of the silenced automatics answered him.

When Dick and the guards reached the spot, the man was lying in a crumpled heap.

"An airplane," he gasped. "Invisible airplane. I—bumped into it. Men—in it. The damned dogs!"

He died. Dick stared around him. There was no sign of any airplane on the lawn, nothing but the tents of the guards, white in the moonlight, and the grim array of anti-aircraft guns that Dick had placed there.

But behind the White House, in hastily constructed hangars, were a half-dozen of the latest pursuit airships—beautiful slim hulls, heavily armored, with armored turrets containing each a quick-firer with the new armor-piercing bullets. One of these ships, Dick's own, was kept perpetually warmed and ready to take the air.

DICK raced across the lawn, yelled to the startled guard in charge. The mechanics came running from their quarters. Almost by the time Dick reached it the ship was ready.

He twirled the helicopter starter, and she roared and zoomed, taking an angle of a hundred and twenty-five degrees upward off a runway of twenty yards. Into the air she soared, into the moonlight, up like an arrow for five hundred feet.

Dick pulled the soaring lever, and she hung there, buzzing like a bee as her helicopters, counteracting the pull of gravity, held her comparatively stable. He scanned the air all about him.

Washington lay below, her myriad lights gleaming. Immediately beneath him Dick saw the guns and the tents of the soldiers, and the little group that was removing the body of the murdered soldier on a stretcher. But there were no signs of any hostile craft.

Had the murdered man really bumped into an invisible airship, or had he only thought he had? Had those devils learned to apply the gas to the surfaces of airplanes? There was no reason why they should not have done so.

But surely the utmost ingenuity of man had not contrived to render a modern plane, with its metalwork and machinery, absolutely transparent?

AND, again, how was it possible to have silenced the sound of engines, the whir of a propeller, so that there should be no auditory indication whatever of a plane's presence?

Dick looked all about him. Nothing was in the air—he could have sworn it. He replaced the soaring lever and banked in a close circle, his glance piercing the night. No, there was nothing.

Crash! Boom! The plane rocked violently, tossing upon gusts of air. A huge, gaping hole of blackness had suddenly appeared in the middle of the White House lawn. The tents were flat upon the ground. Through the rising smoke clouds Dick saw tongues of flame.

No shell that, but a bomb, and dropped from the skies less than five

hundred feet from where Dick hovered. Yet there was nothing visible in the skies save the round orb of the moon.

A rush of wind past Dick's face! One of the vanes of the helicopter crumpled and fluttered away into the night. Dick needed no further persuasion. The dead soldier had not lied.

Von Kettler had begun the fulfillment of his threat!

CHAPTER V

The Enemy Strikes

AS Dick's airship veered and side-slipped, he kicked hard on the left rudder and brought the nose around. Furiously he sprayed the air with a leaden hail from his quick-firer. He heard a rush of wind go past him, and realized that his unseen antagonist had all but rammed him.

Yet nothing was visible at all, save the moon and the empty sky. He had heard the rush of the prop-wash, but he had seen nothing, heard nothing else. Incredible as it seemed, the pilot was flying a plane that had attained not merely invisibility but complete absence of all sound.

Dick side-slipped down, pancaked, and crashed. He emerged from a plane wrecked beyond hope of early repair, yet luckily with no injury beyond a few minor bruises. He rushed toward the hangar, to encounter a bevy of scared mechanics.

"Another plane! Rev one up quick!" he shouted.

Planes were already being wheeled out, pilots in flying suits and goggles were striding beside them. Dick ordered one of them away, stepped into his plane, and in a moment was in the air again.

In the minute or two that had elapsed since the encounter, the enemy had been active. Crash after crash was resounding from various parts of Washington. Buildings were rocking and toppling, débris strewed the streets, fires were springing up everywhere. A thousand feet aloft, Dick could see the holocaust of destruction that was being wrought by the infernal missiles.

Bombs of such power had been the unattained ambition of every government of the world—and it had been left to the men of the Invisible Emperor to attain to them. Whole streets went into ruin at each discharge and from everywhere within the city the wailing cry of the injured went up, in a resonant moan of pain.

In the central part of the city, the district about F Street and the government buildings, nothing was standing, except those buildings fashioned of structural steel, and these showed twisted girders like the skeletons of primeval monsters, supporting sections of sagging floors. Houses, hotels had melted into shapeless heaps of rubble, which filled the streets to a depth of a dozen yards, burying everything beneath them. Yet here and there could be seen the forms of dead pedestrians, motor-cars emerging out of the débris, lying in every conceivable position; horses, horribly mangled, were shrieking as they tried to free themselves. And yet, despite this ruin, the general impression upon Dick's mind, as he beat to and fro, signaling to his flight to spread, was that of a vast, empty desolation.

FURTHER away, where the ruin had not yet fallen, thousands of human beings were milling in a mass, those upon the fringes of the crowd perpetually breaking away, other swarms approaching them, so that the entire agglomeration resembled a seething whirlpool turning slowly upon itself.

Then of a sudden the strains of the national anthem floated up to Dick's ears. A band was playing in the White House grounds. The tune was ragged, and the drum came in a fraction of a second late, but an immense pride and elation filled Dick's soul.

"They'll never beat us!" he thought,

intensely, "with such a spirit as that!"

He had signaled his flight to spread, and search the air. He could see the individual ships darting here and there over the immensity of the city, but none knew better than he how fruitless their effort was. And the marauders had not ceased their deadly work.

A bomb dropped near the Washington Monument, sending up a huge spout of dust that veiled it from his eyes. Instinctively Dick shot toward the scene. Slowly the dust subsided, and then a yell of exultation broke from Dick's lips. The noble shaft still stood, a slim taper pointing to the skies.

It was an omen of ultimate success, and Dick took heart. No, they'd never beat the grim, unconquerable tenacity of the American people.

Yet the damage was proceeding at a frightful rate. A bomb dropped squarely on the Corcoran Gallery and resolved it into a heap of silly stones. A bomb fell in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the houses on either side collapsed like houses of cards, falling into a sulphurous, fiery pit. And still there was nothing visible but the sky and the moon.

DICK gritted his teeth and swore as he circled over the site of destruction, out of which tiny figures were struggling. He heard the clang of the fire bells as the motor trucks came roaring toward the scene. Then crash! again. Five blocks northward another dense cloud of dust arose, and the new area of destruction, spreading as swiftly as ripples over a pond, joined the former one, leaving a huge, irregular open space, piled up with masonry and brick in a number of flat-topped pyramids.

Into this houses went crashing every moment, with a sound like the clatter of falling crockery, but infintely magnified.

"The devils! The swine!" shouted Dick. "And we gave Von Kettler the privileges of an ambassador!"

And Fredegonde was the sister of this devil! The remembrance of that struck a cold chill to Dick's heart again. He tried to blot out her picture from his mind, but he still saw her as she had appeared that day after the air ride, flushed, smiling, radiant in her dark beauty.

A murderess and a spy! He cursed her as he banked and circled back. He was helpless. He could do nothing. And all Washington would be destroyed by morning, if the supply of bombs kept up. But there was more to come. Suddenly Dick became aware that two of his flight, at widely separated distances, were going down in flames. Flaming comets, they dropped plump into the destruction below. Another caught fire and was going down. No need to question what was happening.

The invisible enemy was attacking his flight and picking off his men one by one!

He drove furiously toward two of his planes whose erratic movements showed that they were being attacked. As he neared them he saw one catch fire and begin its earthward swoop. Then the fuselage crackled beside him and his instrument board dissolved into ruin. Instinctively he went round in a tight bank and loosed his machine-gun. Nothing there! Nothing at all! Yet his right wing went ragged, and his own furious blasts into the sky, their echoes drowned by the roar of his propeller, were productive of nothing.

HE shot past the uninjured plane, signalling it to descend. He wasn't going to let his men ride aloft to helpless butchery. Nothing could be done until some means was discovered of counteracting the enemy's terrific advantage.

He darted across the heart of the city to where another of the flight was circling, waggling his wings to indicate to it to descend. Then on to the next plane and the next, shepherding

them. Thank God they understood! They were bunching toward the hangar. Yet another took fire and dropped, a burning wreck. Half his flight out of commission, and not an enemy visible!

He was aloft alone now, courting death—instant, invisible death. He wouldn't descend until that carnival of murder was at an end. But it was not at an end. Another crash, far up Pennsylvania Avenue, showed an attempt upon the Capitol. Again—again, and a smoking hell wreathed the noble buildings so that it was no longer possible to see them. A lull, and then a crash nearer the city's heart. Crash! Crash!

Invisible though the enemy was, it was easy to trace the movements of this particular plane by the successive areas of destruction that it left behind it. It was coming back over Pennsylvania Avenue, dropping its bombs at intervals. It was methodically wiping out an entire section of Washington.

Dick drove his plane toward it. There was one chance in a thousand that, if he could accurately gauge the progress of his invisible antagonist, he could crash him and go down with him to death. If he could get close enough to feel his prop-wash! A wild chance, but Dick's mind was keyed up to desperation. He shot like an arrow toward the scene, with a view to intercepting the murderer.

Then of a sudden he became aware of a curious prenomenon. A black beam was shooting across the sky. A black searchlight! It came from the flat top of a large hotel that had somehow escaped the universal destruction, and, with its gaunt skeleton of structural steel showing in squares, towered out of the ruin all about it like an island.

IT was from here that the black beam started. It spread fanwise across the sky. But it was not merely blackness. It was utter and impenetrable darkness, cleaving the sky like a knife. Where it passed, the rays of the moon were extinguished as fire is extinguished by water.

A beam of absolute blackness, that pierced the air like a widening cone, and made the night seem, by contrast, of dazzling brightness along either dark border.

High into the air that dark beam shot, moving to and fro in the sky. Dick, darting toward the spot where he hoped to find his invisible enemy, found himself caught in it.

In utter, inextinguishable darkness! Like a trapped bird he fluttered, hurling himself this way and that till suddenly he found himself blinking in the dazzling light of the moon again, and the black beam was overhead.

Crash! Another widening sphere of ruin as the invisible marauder dropped a bomb. Dick cursed bitterly. Trapped in that black beam, he had lost his direction. The invisible plane had shot past the point where he had hoped to intercept it.

He flung his soaring lever, and hung suspended in the air. An easy mark for the enemy, if he chose to take the opportunity. No matter. Death was all that Dick craved. He had seen half his flight wiped out, and a hundred thousand human beings hurled to destruction. He wanted to die.

Then suddenly a wild shout came to his ears, as if all Washington had gone mad with triumph. And Dick heard himself shouting too, before he knew it, almost before he knew why.

FOR overhead, where the inky finger searched the sky, a luminous shape appeared, a silvery cigar, riding in the void. The finger missed it, and again there was only the moonlight. It caught it again—and again the whole devastated city rang with yells of derision, hate, and anger as the black beam held it.

It held it! To and fro that silvery cigar scurried in a frantic attempt to avoid detection, and remorselessly the black beam held it down.

It held it down, and it outlined it as clearly as a figure on the moving picture screen. Then suddenly there came a flash, followed by a dull detonation, and a black cloud appeared, spreading into a flower of death, near the cigar, and at the edge of the black beam. The cheers grew frantic. The anti-aircraft battery in the White House grounds had grasped the situation, and was opening fire.

To and fro, like a trapped beast, the cigar-shaped airplane fled. Once it seemed to escape. It faded from the edge of the black finger—faded into nothingness amid a roar of execretion. Then it was caught and held.

Truncated, bounded by an arc of sky, the black finger followed the murderer in his flight remorselessly. And all around him the anti-aircraft guns were placing a barrage of death.

He was trapped. No need for Dick to rush in to battle. To do so might call off that deadly barrage that held the murderer in a ring of death. Hovering, Dick watched. And then, perhaps panic-stricken, perhaps rendered desperate, perhaps through sheer, wanton courage that might have commanded admiration under nobler circumstances, the airship turned and drove straight in the direction of the battery, dropping another bomb as she did so.

IT fell in a crowded street, swarming with spectators who had clambered upon the fallen débris, and it wrought hideous destruction. But this time there was hardly a cry—no unison of despair such as had come to Dick's ears before. The suspense was too tense. All eyes watched the airship as, seeming to bear a charmed life, she drove for the White House itself, through a ring of shells that widened and contracted alternately, with the object of placing a last bomb squarely upon the building before going down in death. And all the while the black searchlight held it.

Dick Rennell was to experience many thrilling moments afterward, but there was never a period, measurable by seconds, yet seeming to extend through all eternity—never a period quite so fraught with suspense as, hovering there, he watched the flight of that silvery plane speeding straight toward the executive mansion while all around it the shells bloomed and spread. It was over the White House grounds. The archies had failed; they were being outmaneuvered, they could not be swung in time to follow the trajectory of the plane. Dick held his breath.

Then suddenly the silvery ship dissolved in a blaze of fire, a shower of golden sparks such as fly from a rocket, and simultaneously the last bomb that she was to drop broke upon the ground below.

Down she plunged, instantly invisible as she escaped the finger of the black beam; but she dropped into the vortex of ruin that she herself had created. Into a pit of blazing fire, criss-crossed by falling trees, that had engulfed the battery and a score of men.

Then suddenly Dick understood. He flung home the soaring lever, banked, and headed, not for the White House, but for the flat roof of the hotel from which the black searchlight was still projecting itself through the skies. He hovered above, and dropped, light as a feather, upon the rooftop.

THERE was only one person there —an old man dressed in a shabby suit, kneeling before a great block of stone that had been dislodged upward from the parapet and formed a sort of table. Upon this table the old man had placed a large, square box, resembling an exaggerated kodak, and it was from the lens of this box that the black beam was projecting.

Dick sprang from his cockpit as the old man rose in alarm. He ran to him and caught him by the arm.

"Luke Evans!" he cried. "Thank God you've come back in time to save America!"

CHAPTER VI

The Gas

IN the Blue Room of the White House the Council listened to old Luke Evans's exposition of his invention with feelings ranging from incredulity to hope.

"I've been at work all the time," said the old man, "not far from here. I knew the day would come when you'd need me. I put my pride aside for the sake of my country."

"Tell us in a few words about this discovery of yours, Mr. Evans," said Colonel Stopford.

Luke Evans placed the square black case upon the table. "It's simple, like all big things, sir," he answered. "The original shadow-breaking device that I invented was a heavy, inert gas, invisible, but almost as viscous as paint. Applied to textiles, to inorganic matter, to animal bodies, it adheres for hours. Its property is to render such substances invisible by absorbing all the visible light rays that fall upon it, from red to violet. Light passes through all substances that are coated with this paint as if they did not exist."

"And this antidote of yours?" asked Colonel Stopford.

"Darkness," replied Luke Evans. "A beam of darkness that means absolute invisibility. It can be shot from this apparatus—he indicated the box upon the table. "This box contains a minute portion of a gas which exists in nature in the form of a black, crystalline powder. The peculiar property of this powder is that it is the solidified form of a gas more volatile than any that is known. So volatile is it that, when the ordinary atmospheric pressure of fifteen pounds to the square inch is removed, the powder instantly changes to the gaseous condition.

"By pressing this lever"—Evans pointed at the box—"a vacuum is created. Instantly the powder becomes a gas, which shoots forth through this aperture with the speed of a projectile, taking the form of a beam of absolute blackness. Or it can be discharged from cylinders in such a way as to extend over a large area within a few minutes."

"But how does this darkness make the invisible airships luminous?" asked Stopford. "Why does not your darkness destroy all light?"

"In this way, sir," replied the old inventor. "The shadow-breaking gas with which the airships are painted confers invisibility because it absorbs sunlight. But it does not absorb the still more rapid waves, or oscillations which manifest themselves as radioactivity. On the contrary, it gathers and reflects these.

"Now Roentgen, the discoverer of the X-ray, observed that if X-rays are allowed to enter the eye of an observer who is in complete darkness, the retina receives a stimulus, and light is perceived, due to the fluorescent action of the X-rays upon the eyeball.

"Consequently, by creating a beam of complete darkness, I bring into clear visibility the fluorescent gas that coats the airships; in other words, the airships become visible."

"If a light ray is nullified upon entering the field of darkness, will it emerge at the other edge as a perfect light ray again?" asked Stopford.

"It will emerge unchanged, since the black beam destroys light by slightly slowing down the vibrations to a point where they are not perceived as light by the human eye. On emerging from the beam, however, these vibrations immediately resume their natural frequency. To give you a homely parallel, the telephone changes sound waves to electric waves, and reconverts them into sound waves at the other end, without any appreciable interruption."

"Then," said Stopford, "the logical application of your method is to plunge every city in the land into darkness by means of this gas?"

"That is so, sir, and then we shall have the advantage of invisibility, and

the enemy ships will be in fluorescence."

"Damned impracticable!" muttered Stopford.

"You seriously propose to darken the greater part of eastern North America?" asked the Secretary for War.

"The gas can be produced in large quantities from coal tar besides existing in crystalline deposits," replied Luke Evans. "It is so volatile that I estimate that a single ton will darken all eastern North America for five days. Whereas the concentration would be made only in specific areas liable to attack. The gas is distilled with great facility from one of the triphenyl-carbinol coal-tar derivatives."

Vice-president Tomlinson was a pompous, irascible old man, but it was he who hit the nail on the head.

"That's all very well as an emergency measure, but we've got to find the haunt of that gang and smash it!"

An orderly brought in a telegraphic dispatch and handed it to him. The Vice-president opened it, glanced through it, and tried to hand it to the Secretary of State. Instead, it fluttered from his nerveless fingers, and he sank back with a groan. The Secretary picked it up and glanced at it.

"Gentlemen," he said, trying to control his voice, "New York was bombed out of the blue at sunrise this morning, and the whole lower part of the city is a heap of ruins."

IN the days that followed it became clear that all the resources of America would be needed to cope with the Invisible Empire. Not a day passed without some blow being struck. Boston, Charleston, Baltimore, Pittsburg in turn were devastated. Three cruisers and a score of minor craft were sunk in the harbor of Newport News, where they were concentrating, and thenceforward the fleet became a fugitive force, seeking concealment rather than an offensive. Trans-Atlantic sea-traffic ceased.

Meanwhile the black gas was being hurriedly manufactured. From cylinders placed in central positions in a score of cities it was discharged continuously, covering these centers with an impenetrable pall of night that no light would penetrate. Only by the glow of radium paint, which commanded fabulous prices, could official business be transacted, and that only to a very small degree.

Courts were closed, business suspended, prisoners released, perforce, from jails. Famine ruled. The remedy was proving worse than the disease. Within a week the use of the dark gas had had to be discontinued. And a temporary suspension of the raids served only to accentuate the general terror.

There were food riots everywhere, demands that the Government come to terms, and counter-demands that the war be fought out to the bitter end.

Fought out, when everything was disorganized? Stocks of food congested all the terminals, mobs rioted and battled and plundered all through the east.

"It means surrender," was voiced at the Council meeting by one of the members. And nobody answered him.

Three days of respite, then, instead of bombs, proclamations fluttering down from a cloudless sky. Unless the white flag of surrender was hoisted from the summit of the battered Capitol, the Invisible Emperor would strike such a blow as should bring America to her knees!

IT was a twelve-hour ultimatum, and before three hours had passed thousands of citizens had taken possession of the Capitol and filled all the approaches. Over their heads floated banners—the Stars and Stripes, and, blazoned across them the words, "No Surrender."

It was a spontaneous uprising of the people of Washington. Hungry, homeless in the sharpening autumn weather, and nearly all bereft of members of

their families, too often of the bread-winner, now lying deep beneath the rubble that littered the streets, they had gathered in their thousands to protest against any attempt to yield.

Dick, flying overhead at the apex of his squadron, felt his heart swell with elation as he watched the orderly crowds. This was at three in the afternoon; at six the ultimatum ended, the new frightfulness was to begin.

At five, Vice-president Tomlinson was to address the crowds. The old man had risen to the occasion. He had cast off his pompousness and vanity, and was known to favor war to the bitter end. Dick and his squadron circled above the broken dome as the car that carried the Vice-president and the secretaries of State and for War approached along the Avenue.

Rat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat!

Out of the blue sky streams of lead were poured into the assembled multitudes. Instantly they had become converted into a panic-stricken mob, turning this way and that.

Rat-a-tat-tat. Swaths of dead and dying men rolled in the dust, and, as wheat falls under the reaper's blade, the mob melted away in lines and by battalions. Within thirty seconds the whole terrain was piled with dead and dying.

"My God, it's massacre! It's murder!" shouted Dick.

THEY had not even waited for the twelve hours to expire. To and fro the invisible airplanes shot through the blue evening sky, till the last fugitives were streaming away in all directions like hunted deer, and the dead lay piled in ghastly heaps everywhere.

Out of these heaps wounded and dying men would stagger to their feet to shake their fists impotently at their murderers.

In vain Dick and his squadron strove to dash themselves into the invisible airships. The pilots eluded them with ease, sometimes sending a contemptuous round of machine-gun bullets in their direction, but not troubling to shoot them down.

Two small boys, carrying a huge banner with "No Surrender" across it, were walking off the ghastly field. Twelve or fourteen years old at most, they disdained to run. They were singing, singing the National Anthem, though their voices were inaudible through the turmoil.

Rat-tat! Rat-tat-a-tat! The fiends above loosed a storm of lead upon them. Both fell. One rose, still clutching the banner in his hand and waved it aloft. In a sudden silence his childish treble could be heard:

> My country, 'tis of thee
> Sweet land of lib-er-ty—

The guns rattled again. Clutching the blood-stained banner, he dropped across the body of his companion.

Suddenly a broad band of black soared upward from the earth. Those in charge of the cylinders placed about the Capitol had released the gas.

A band of darkness, rising into the blue, cutting off the earth, making the summit of the ruined Capitol a floating dome. But, fast as it rose, the invisible airships rose faster above it.

A last vicious volley! Two of Dick's flight crashing down upon the piles of dead men underneath! And nothing was visible, though the darkness rose till it obliterated the blue above.

AT dawn the Council sat, after an all-night meeting. Vice-president Tomlinson, one arm shattered by a machine-gun bullet, still occupied the chair at the head of the table.

Outside, immediately about the White House, there was not a sound. Washington might have been a city of the dead. The railroad terminals, however, were occupied by a mob of people, busily looting. There was great disorder. Organized government had simply disappeared.

Each man was occupied only with obtaining as much food as he could carry, and taking his family into rural

districts where the Terror would not be likely to pursue. All the roads leading out of Washington—into Virginia, into Maryland, were congested with columns of fugitives that stretched for miles.

Some, who were fortunate enough to possess automobiles, and—what was rarer—a few gallons of gas, were trying to force their way through the masses ahead of them; here and there a family trudged beside a pack-horse, or a big dog drew an improvised sled on wheels, loaded with flour, bacon, blankets, pillows. Old men and young children trudged on uncomplaining.

The telegraph wires were still, for the most part, working. All the world knew what was happening. From all the big cities of the East a similar exodus was proceeding. There was little bitterness and little disorder.

It was not the airship raids from which these crowds were fleeing. Something grimmer was happening. The murderous attack upon the populace about the Capitol had been merely an incident. This later development was the fulfilment of the Invisible Emperor's ultimatum.

Death was afield, death, invisible, instantaneous, and inevitable. Death blown on the winds, in the form of the deadliest of unknown gases.

IN the Blue Room of the White House a score of experts had gathered. Dick, too, with the chiefs of his staff. Stopford, and the army and naval heads. Among them was the chief of the Meteorological Bureau, and it was to him primarily that Tomlinson was reading a telegraphic dispatch from Wilmington, South Carolina:

"The Invisible Death has reached this point and is working havoc throughout the city, spreading from street to street. Men are dropping dead everywhere. A few have fled, but—"

The sudden ending of the dispatch was significant enough. Tomlinson picked up another dispatch from Columbia, in the same State:

"Invisible Death now circling city," he read. "Business section already invaded. All other telegraphists have left posts. Can't say how long—"

And this, too, ended in the same way. There were piles of such communications, and they had been coming in for eighteen hours. At that moment an orderly brought in a dozen more.

Tomlinson showed the head of the Meteorological Bureau the chart upon the table. "We've plotted out a map as the wires came in, Mr. Graves," he said. "The Invisible Death struck the southeast shore of the United States yesterday afternoon near Charleston. It has spread approximately at a steady rate. The wind velocity—?"

"Remains constant. Seventy miles an hour. Dying down a little," answered Graves.

"The death line now runs from Wilmington, South Carolina, straight to Augusta, Georgia," the Vice-president pursued. "Every living thing that this gas has encountered has been instantly destroyed. Men, cattle, birds, vermin, wild beasts. The gas is invisible and inodorous. These gentlemen believe it may be a form of hydrocyanic acid, but of a concentration beyond anything known to chemistry, so deadly that a billionth part of it to one of air must be fatal, otherwise it could not have traveled as it has done. Warnings have been broadcasted, but there are no stocks of chemicals that might counteract it. Flight is the only hope—flight at seventy miles an hour!"

HIS voice shook. "This gas has been loosed, as you told us, upon the wings of the hurricane that came through the Florida Strait. What are the chances of its reaching Washington?"

"Mr. Vice-president, if the wind continues, and this gas has sufficient concentration, it should be in Washington within the next eight hours," Graves replied. "If the wind changes direc-

tion, however, this gas will probably be blown out to sea, or into the Alleghanies, where it will probably be dissipated among the hills, or by the foliage on the mountains. I'm not a chemist—"

"No, sir, and I am not consulting you as one," answered old Tomlinson. "A death belt several hundred miles in length and three or four hundred deep has already been cut across this continent. We are faced with wholesale, unmitigated murder, on such a scale as was never known before. But we are an integral part of America, and Washington has no more right to expect immunity than our devastated Southern States. The question we wish to put to you is, can you trace the exact course taken by the hurricane?"

"I can, Mr. Vice-president," answered Graves. "It originated somewhere in the West Indian seas, like all these storms. We've been getting our reports almost as usual. Our first one came from Nassau, which was badly damaged. The storm missed the Florida coast, as many of them do, and struck the coast of South Carolina—in fact, we received a report from Charleston, which must have almost coincided with your first report of the gas."

"If the storm missed the Florida coast, it follows that the gas was not discharged from any point on the American continent," said Tomlinson. "From some point off Florida—from some island, or from a plane or from a ship at sea."

"Not from a ship at sea, Mr. Vice-president," interposed the head of the Chemical Bureau. "To discharge gas on such an extensive scale would require more space than could be furnished by the largest vessel, in my opinion."

"In all probability the gas was 'loaded,' so to say, onto the gale somewhere in the Bahamas," said Graves. That seems to me the most likely explanation.

VICE-PRESIDENT TOMLINSON nodded, and picked up one of the latest telegraphic dispatches, as if absently.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the Invisible Death has already reached Charlotte."

He picked up another. "Reported Abaco Island, Bahamas, totally wrecked by storm. All communication has ceased," he read. He turned to Dick and spoke as if inspired. "Captain Rennell, there is your destination," he thundered. "They've betrayed themselves. We've got them now. You understand?"

"By God, sir! It's from Abaco Island, then, that those devils have been carrying on their game of wholesale murder!"

Suddenly a contagion of enthusiasm seemed to sweep the whole assemblage. Every man was upon his feet in an instant, white, quivering, lips opened for speech that trembled there and did not come.

It was Secretary Norris spoke. "The Vice-president has hit the mark," he said, with a dramatic gesture of his arm. "Yes, they've betrayed themselves. Their headquarters are on Abaco Island. It's one of the largest in the Bahamas." He turned to the Secretary for the Navy. "You can rush the fleet there, sir?" he asked.

"Within forty-eight hours I'll have every vessel that can float off Abaco Island."

"I'll concentrate all airplanes. Take your flight, Captain Rennell. We'll stamp out that nest of murderers if we blow Abaco Island to the bottom of the sea. It can be done!"

"It can be done, sir—with Luke Evans and his invention," answered Dick.

CHAPTER VII

On the Trail

THREE hours later, about the time when the war council rose after completing its plans, a sudden shift of the wind blew the poison gas out to

sea, just when it appeared certain that it would reach the capital of the nation.

The southern half of Virginia had been swept over. Operators, telegraph and telephone, staying at their posts, had sent in constant messages that had terminated with an abruptness which told of the tragic sequel. Yet, at that distance from its source, the intensity of the gas had been to some extent dissipated.

Poisonous beyond any gas known, so deadly as to make hydrocyanic gas innocuous in comparison, still, as it was swept northward on the wings of the wind, there had been an increasing number of non-fatal casualties. The most northernly point reached by the gas was Richmond, and here some fifty per cent of those stricken had suffered paralysis instead of death.

But a new element had been injected into the situation. Even the heroic courage shown by the populace in the beginning had had its limits. The morning after the news of the Invisible Death's advent was made public, mobs had gathered in all the large cities of the East, demanding surrender.

The submerged elements of crime and disorder had come to the surface at last. Committees were formed, with the avowed object of yielding to the Invisible Emperor, and averting further disaster. In Washington, a city of the dead, half the members of Congress and the Senators had gathered in the ruined Capitol, to debate the situation.

There were rumors of an impending march on the White House, of a coup d'état.

THE action of the Government was prompt. Five hundred loyalists were enrolled, armed, and posted round the White House; every avenue of approach was commanded by machine-guns. Meanwhile the news was spread by radio that the headquarters of the Invisible Emperor had been located, and that a strong bombing squadron was being dispatched to destroy it.

The entire fleet was to follow, and it was confidently anticipated that within a little while the Terror would be at an end.

Those at the white House were less sanguine. There was none but realized the diabolical strength of their antagonists.

"Everything depends upon the outcome of the next forty-eight hours, and everything depends on you, Rennell," said Secretary Norris to Dick, as he stood beside his plan. Behind him his flight of a dozen airships was drawn up.

"Find them," added the Secretary; "cover Abaco Island with the black gas, and the navy and the marines will wipe up the mess that you leave behind you. God help you—and all of us, Rennell!"

He gripped Dick's hand and turned away. Dick was very sober-minded as he climbed into his cockpit. He knew to the full how much depended upon himself and Luke Evans. Already the shouts of the insurgents were to be heard at the ends of the barriers, commanded by the machine-guns, and patrolled by the enlisted volunteers.

Negro mobs were building counter-barricades of their own with rubble from the fallen edifices. Civil war might be postponed for eight-and-forty hours, but after that, unless there was news of victory, the whole structure of civilization would be smashed irreparably.

It was up to Dick and Luke Evans, and they had assumed such a responsibility as rarely falls to the lot of man in war.

DICK was to lead the flight in a two-seater Barwell plane. This was one of the latest types, and had been hurriedly adapted to the purpose for which it was to be used. Dick himself occupied the rear seat, with its dual controls, and the gun in its armored casing. In front sat old Luke

Evans, in charge of the black gas projector.

His famous camera box, containing a minute quantity of gas in slow combustion, and projecting the black searchlight, had been built into the plane. In the rack beside him were a number of the black gas bombs, each of which, dropped to earth, would release enough gas to cover a considerable area with darkness. Both Luke and Dick wore respirators filled with charcoal and sodium thio-sulphate, and beside Dick a cage containing three guinea-pigs rested.

These little rodents were so sensitive to atmospheric changes that a quantity of hydrocyanic acid too minute to affect a man would produce instantaneous death on them.

From its hiding-place off the Virginia coast the American fleet was steaming hotly southward toward Abaco Island, cruisers, destroyers, submarines. That Abaco was British territory had simply not been considered in this crisis of history.

The twelve airships that followed Dick's contained enough bombs to put the headquarters of the Invisible Empire out of business for good. The naval guns would complete the same business.

All day Dick and Luke Evans flew southwestward. At first glance, everything appeared normal. The catastrophe that had fallen upon the land was visible only in the shape of the lines of tiny figures, extending for miles, that choked all the roads radiating out of the principal cities. It was only when they were over the southern portion of Virginia that the ravages of deadly gas became apparent.

Flying low, Dick could see the fields strewn with the bodies of dead cattle. Here and there, at the doors of farmhouses, the inmates could be seen, lying together in gruesome heaps, caught and killed instantaneously as they attempted flight. Here, too, were figures on the roads, but they were figures of dead men and women.

THEY strewed the roads for miles, lying as they had been trapped—men, women, children, horses, mules, and dogs. The spectacle was an appaling one. Dick set his jaws grimly. He was thinking that the Council had let Von Kettler escape. He was thinking of Frodegonde. But he would not let himself think of her. She deserved no more pity than the rest of the murderous crew.

Over the Carolinas the conditions were still more appaling. Here deadly gas had struck with all its concentrated power. A city materialized out of the blue distance, a factory town with all chimneys spiring upward into the blue, a section of tall buildings intersected by canyonlike streets, around it a rim of trim houses, bungalows, indicative of prosperity and comfort. And it was a city of the dead.

For everywhere around it, on all the roads, the dead lay piled on top of one another. For miles—all the inhabitants, rich and poor, business men, factory hands, negroes. There had been a mad rush as the fatal gas drove onward upon its lethal way, and all the fugitives had been overwhelmed simultaneously.

Here were golf links, with little groups strewn on the grass and fairways; here, at one of the holes, four men, their putters still in their hands, crouched in death. Here was the wreckage of a train that had collided with a string of freight cars at an untended switch, and from the shattered windows the heads and bodies of the dead protruded in serried ranks.

Dick looked back. His flight was driving on behind him. He guessed their feelings. They had sworn, as he had sworn, that none of them would return without stamping out that abomination from the earth forever.

HE signaled to the flight to rise, and zoomed upward to twelve thousand feet. He did not want to look upon any more of those horrors. At that height, the peaceful landscape

lay extended underneath, in a checkerboard of farms and woodlands. One could pretend that it was all a vile dream.

He avoided Charleston, and winged out above the Atlantic, striking a straight course along the coast toward the Bahamas. The shores of Georgia vanished in the west. Dick began to breathe more freely. His mind shook off its weight of horror. Only the blue sea and the blue sky were visible. The aftermath of the gale remained in the shape of a strong head breeze and white crests below.

Dick glanced at the guinea-pigs. They were busily gnawing their cabbage and carrots. The gas had evidently been entirely dissipated by the wind.

Toward sunset the low, jutting foreland of Canaveral on the east coast of Florida, came into view. Dick shifted course a little. Three hours more should see them over Abaco.

His flight had explicit instructions. As soon as the black gas had rendered visible the headquarters of the Invisible Emperor, they were to circle above, dropping their bombs. When these were exhausted, the machine guns would come into play. There was to be no attention paid to signals of surrender. They were to wipe out the headquarters, to kill every living thing that showed itself—and the navy and the marines would mop up anything left over.

The sun went down in a blaze of gold and crimson. Night fell. The moon began to climb the east. The black sea, stretching beneath, was as empty as on the day when it was created. Nothing in the shape of navigation appeared.

Two hours, three hours, and old Evans turned round in his cockpit and pointed. On the horizon a black thread was beginning to stretch against the sky. It was Abaco Island, in the Bahama group. They were nearly at their destination. An hour more—perhaps two hours, and the deadly menace that threatened America might be removed forever. Dick breathed a silent prayer for success.

THEY were over Abaco. A long, flat island, seventy miles or so in extreme length, and fairly wide, covered with a dense growth of tropical brush and forest, with here and there open spaces, near the seacoast an occasional farm-house. Dick dropped to five thousand, to three, to one. The moon made the whole land underneath as bright as day.

There were no evidence of destruction by the hurricane. The farmhouses stood substantial and well roofed. If death had struck Abaco Island, it had been the work of man, not Nature.

Dick zoomed almost to his ceiling, until, in the brilliant moonlight, he could see Abaco Island from side to side. For the most part it was heavily wooded with mahogany and lignum vitae; toward the central portion there was open land, but there was not the least sign of any construction work.

Again he swooped, indicating to his flight to follow him. At a thousand feet he examined the open district intently. Here, if anywhere upon the island, the Invisible Emperor had his headquarters. Was it conceivable that a gas factory, hangars, ammunition depots could exist here invisibly, when he could look straight down upon the ground?

Dick's heart sank. The hideous fear came to him that Graves had been mistaken, that he had come on a wild-goose chase. This could not be the place. It was quite incredible.

Again and again he circled, studying the ground beneath. Now he could see that the tough grass and undergrowth marked curious geometrical patterns. Here, for example, was an oblong of bare earth around which the vegetation grew, and it was obviously the work of man.

Here were four squares of bare ground set side by side, with thin

strips of vegetation growing between them.

Then of a sudden Dick knew! Those squares and parallelograms of bare ground indicated the foundations of buildings. *He was looking down on the very site of the Invisible Emperor's stronghold!*

He shouted, and pointed downward. Luke Evans looked round and nodded. He understood. He patted the camera-box with a grim smile on his old face.

CHAPTER VIII

The Magnetic Trap

UPON those squares and oblongs of bare earth, incredible as it seemed, rose the structures of the Invisible Empire, themselves both invisible and transparent, so that one looked straight down through them and saw only the ground beneath them.

Every interior floor and girder must have been treated with the gas. They had been cunning. They must have discovered some permanent means of charging paint with the shadow-breaking gas, so that the buildings would remain invisible for months and years instead of hours.

But they had not been cunning enough. It had not occurred to them that the foundations would still be visible underneath, for the simple reason that grass does not grow without sunlight.

Dick saw old Luke Evans nodding and pointing downward. The old man picked up his end of the speaking-tube, but Dick ignored the gesture. He signaled to his flight to rise, and zoomed up, circling, and studying the land beneath.

That oblong was evidently the central building. Those four squares probably housed airplanes, and each would hold half a dozen. That elliptical building might contain a dirigible. That round patch was probably the gas factory.

Now Dick could see more patches of bare ground, extending in the direction of the sea. He gunned his ship and followed the gap among the trees to the ocean, a few miles distant. Yes, there were more evidence of activity here. Beside the water, in what looked like a deep natural harbor, was what seemed to be the foundations of a dock. Perhaps even vessels of war floated on the phosphorescent Bahama sea.

HE circled back, his flock wheeling like a flight of birds and following him. He signaled to them to scatter. They had certainly been observed; at any moment a hail of lead might assail them invisibly out of the air. They must get to work quickly. But had they understood the significance of those bare patches?

Dick saw Luke Evans still fidgeting impatiently with his end of the speaking-tube, and picked it up.

"I'm thinking, Captain Rennell, we've got no time to lose if we want to keep the upper hand of those devils," called the old man.

"Yes, you're right," Dick answered. "Lay a trail of gas bombs all around those hangars and buildings, enough to hold them dark for some time. And keep a bomb or two in reserve."

Luke Evans shouted back. The plane was again above the structures. The old man dropped a bomb over the side, and Dick zoomed again, his flight wheeling up behind him.

Higher and higher, banking and going round in a succession of tight spirals, Dick flew. Every moment he expected the blow to fall. As he rose, Luke Evans dropped bomb after bomb. A thousand feet beneath the flight was taking up positions, hovering with the helicopters, looking up to Dick for the signal, and waiting.

Then from beneath the cloud of black gas began to rise, as Luke Evans dropped his bombs. It filled the lower spaces of the sky, blotting out the land in impenetrable darkness. That darkness, above which Dick and his flight

were soaring, rose like a solid wall, built by some prehistoric race that aimed to fling a tower into the heavens.

And then — the miracle! Dick gasped in sheer delight as he realized that he had made no mistake.

AT first all he could see was a number of criss-crossing phosphorescent lines that appeared shimmering through the blackness underneath. They ran luminously here and there, forming no particular pattern, much like the figures on the radium dial of a watch when first they come into wavering visibility at night.

Then the lines began to intersect one another, to assume geometric patterns and curves. And bit by bit they took meaning and significance.

And suddenly the whole invisible stronghold lay revealed upon the ground beneath, a shining, dazzling play of weaving light.

Buildings and hangars stood out, clearly revealed; the rounded vault of a dirigible hangar, and the shining ribbon of a road that ran through a pitch-dark tarmac, and was evidently constructed from some gas-impregnated materials. On this tarmac was a flight of shining airplanes, ready to take off. There were the odd, ovoid figures of the aviators in their silken overalls. More figures appeared, running out from the buildings. It was clear that the sudden raid had taken them all by surprise.

Luke Evans yelled and pointed. "We've got them now, sir!" Dick heard above the whine of the helicopter engine. "We've—"

But of a sudden the old man's voice died away, though his mouth was still moving.

Dick leaned out of his cockpit and fired a single red Very light, the signal for the attack. And from each plane of his flight, beneath him, a bomb slid from its rack and went hurtling down upon the gang below, while the airplanes circled and hovered, each taking up its station.

DICK was too late. By a whole minute he had missed his chance. He realized that immediately, for, before the red light had flared from his pistol, the hostile planes were in the air. He had flown too low, and given the alarm.

It meant a fight now, instead of a mad dog destruction, and Dick did not underestimate the power of the enemy. But he felt a thrill of furious satisfaction at the prospect of battle. From every plane the bombs were falling. Underneath, ruin and destruction, and leaping flames—and yet darkness, save for the phosphorescent outlines of the buildings.

And the lines of these were broken, converging into strange criss-crosses of luminosity, as the beams fell in shapeless heaps. Dark fire, sweeping through the headquarters of the Invisible Emperor, a veritable hell for those below! A taste of the hell that they had made for others!

Then a strange phenomenon obtruded itself upon Dick's notice. *Nothing was audible!* The bombs were falling, but they were falling silently. No sound came up from beneath. And, except for the throbbing of his engine, Dick would have thought it had stopped. He could no longer hear it.

That terrific holocaust of death and destruction was inaudible. Skimming the upper reaches of the air, high above that wall of darkness, Dick saw old Luke Evans pick up his end of the speaking-tube, and mechanically followed suit. He could see the old man's lips moving. But he heard nothing!

And now another phenomenon was borne in on his notice. His flight were perhaps five hundred feet beneath him, hovering a little above the barrage of black gas. But they were converging oddly. And there was no sight of the airplanes that Dick had just seen taking off from the invisible tarmac.

DICK fired two Very lights as a signal to his flight to scatter. What were they doing, bunching to-

gether like a flock of sheep, when at any moment the enemy planes might come swooping in, riddling them with bullets? He thrust the stick forward—and then realized that his controls had gone dead!

He thought for a moment that a wire had snapped. But the stick responded perfectly to his hand, only it had no longer control over his plane. He kicked right rudder, and the plane remained motionless. He pushed home the soaring lever, to neutralize the helicopter and the plane still soared.

Then he noticed that the needle of his earth-inductor compass-indicator was oscillating madly, and realized that it was not his plane that was at fault.

Underneath him, his flight seemed to be milling wildly as the ships turned in every direction of the compass. But not for long. They were nosing in, until the whole flight resembled an enormous airplane engine, with twelve radial points, corresponding to their propellers, and the noses pointing symmetrically inward, like a herd of game, yarding in winter time.

And now the true significance came home to Dick. A vertical line of magnetic force, an invisible mast, had been shot upward from the ground. The airplanes were moored to it by their noses, as effectively as if they had been fastened with steel wires.

And he, too, was struggling against that magnetic force that was slowly drawing him, despite his utmost efforts, to a fixed position five hundred feet above his flight.

FOR a few moments, by feeding his engine gas to the limit, Dick thought he might have a chance of escaping. Her nose a fixed point, Dick whirled round and round in a dizzy maze, attempting to break that invisible mooring-chain. Then suddenly the engine went dead. He was trapped helplessly.

He saw old Evans gesticulating wildly in the front cockpit. The old man hoisted himself, leaned over the cowling, gibbered in Dick's ear. The silent engine had ceased to throb, and the old man's shouts were simply not translated into sound.

Suddenly the flight beneath jerked downward, just as a flag jerks when it is hauled down a pole. They vanished into the dark cloud beneath. At the same time there came a jerk that dropped Dick's plane a hundred feet, and flung him violently against the rim of the cockpit.

Another followed. By drops of a hundred feet at a time, Dick was being hauled down into the darkness underneath him.

It rushed up at him. One moment he was suspended upon the rim of it, seeing the moon and stars above him; the next he had been plunged into utter blackness. Blackness more intense than anything that could be conceived—soundless blackness, that was the added horror of it. Blackness of Luke Evans's contriving, but none the less fearful on that account!

And yet, as Dick was jerked slowly downward, slowly a pale visibility began to diffuse itself underneath. The black cloud was beginning to roll away. The luminous lines began to fade, and in place of them appeared little leaping tongues of fire. In front of him Dick saw Luke Evans's form begin to pattern itself upon the darkness. He saw the form move sidewise, and caught at Luke's arm as he was about to hurl another gas bomb.

"No!" he shouted—and heard no sound come from his lips.

LUKE understood. He seemed to be replacing the bomb in the rack. Beneath them now, as they were jerked downward, were fantastic swirls of black mist, and, at the bottom, a pit of fire that was slowly coming into visibility.

Dick uttered a cry of horror! Five hundred feet below his plane he saw the dim forms of his flight, still bunched together, noses almost touching. And they were dropping straight

into that flaming furnace of ruin underneath, which was growing clearer every instant.

Down, jerk by jerk. Down! The black cloud was fast dispersing from the ground. The flight were hardly a thousand feet above the fire. Down—a long jerk that one! Once more! The flames leaped up hungrily about the doomed airships. Cries of mad horror broke from Dick's lips as he witnessed the destruction of ships and men.

He could see almost clearly now. The twelve ships, still retaining their nose-to-nose formation, were in the very heart of the fire. Spurts of exploding gasoline thrust their white tongues upward. There was only one consolation: for the doomed men, death must have come practically instantaneously.

From where he hung, Dick could feel the fierce heat of the flames below. In front of him, old Luke Evans sat in his cockpit like one petrified. He was feebly fumbling at his camera-box, as if he had some idea of using it, and had forgotten that it was fixed to the plane, but the old man seemed temporarily to have lost his wits.

Rushing flames surrounded the burning airships, reducing them to a solid, welded mass of incandescent metal. Dick looked down, waiting for the next jerk that would summon him to join his men. At the moment he was not conscious of either fear or horror, only intense rage against the murderers, and regret that he could never bring back the news of victory.

THE cloud had almost dissipated. In place of the phosphorescence, electric lights had appeared, making the ground beneath perfectly visible. Dick could see a number of men grouped together at the entrance to a large building, part of which had been wrecked by a bomb, though there were no evidences of fire. Other structures had been dismantled and knocked about, but what remained of them had not been charred by fire. Evidently they had been fireproofed. Perhaps the gas itself was incombustible. Only in the middle of the tarmac, where the remnants of the airplanes blazed, was there any sign of fire.

There were three machines resembling dynamos, placed one at each corner of the tarmac, equidistant from the central holocaust. A half-dozen men were grouped about each of them, and by the light from the huge reflector over each Dick saw that they were whirring busily. At the time it did not occur to him that these were the machines that were sending out the electrical force that had held the airplanes powerless.

But as he looked, his mind still a turmoil of hate and hopeless anger, he saw one of the three machines cease whirring. The group about it dispersed, the light above went out. And now his plane, as if drawn by the power of the two remaining machines, began to move jerkily again, not down toward the burning wreckage, but sidewise, away from it.

Straight out toward the side of the tarmac it moved jerked downward diagonally, until it rested only a few feet above the ground.

Then suddenly Dick felt the plane quiver, as if released from the power of the force that had held it. It nosed down and crashed, rolled over amid the wreckage of a shattered wing. The concussion shot Dick, from the cockpit clear of the smashed machine.

He landed upon his head, and went out instantly.

CHAPTER IX

The Invisible Emperor

IT was the sound of his name, spoken repeatedly, that brought Dick back to consciousness. He opened his eyes, blinking in broad daylight. He stared about him, and the first thing he saw was Luke Evans, regarding him anxiously from a little

distance away. He saw that it was Luke who had spoken.

He had heard the old man distinctly. The condition of inaudibility was gone.

Not that of invisibility. Dick stared about him in bewilderment. For a moment, before he quite realized what had happened to him, he thought he had lost his mind. Underneath him was a thick rug, beneath his head a pillow; he could feel both of them, and yet all he could see was the open country, a clearing with shrubbery on either side, and, beyond that, a luxurious growth of tropical trees. Under him, to all visual appearance, was the bare ground.

He moved, and heard the clank of chains. He looked down at himself. His wrists were loosely linked to a chain that seemed to stretch tight into vacancy and end in nothing. His ankles were bound likewise.

And both chains appeared to be of solid silver, but thick enough to give them the strength of iron!

Then he perceived that old Evans was bound in the same way.

"Rennell! Rennell!" repeated the old man in a sort of whimper. "Thank God you've come out of it! I was afraid you were dead."

"What's happened?" asked Dick. "Where are we? Didn't they get us?"

"They've got us, damn them!" snarled old Evans. "All the rest burned to cinders, those fine fellows, Rennell! You were thrown unconscious, but none of my tough old bones were hurt. They pulled us out of the wreckage and brought us in here and tied us with these silver chains."

"In here? But where are we?" demanded Dick, trying to pass his hand across his aching forehead, and realizing that the chain, though it seemed fastened to nothing, was perfectly taut.

"IN one of their damned invisible houses," whimpered the old man. "They're fireproof. Nearly all our bombs fell on the tarmac, and they did hardly any damage at all. One of those devils was bragging about it to me. I couldn't see anything but his eyes. And they've taken away my gas-box," wailed old Luke.

Dick cursed comprehensively and was silent. The burning rage that filled him left him in capable of other utterance. Silver chains! They must be madmen—yes, that was the only explanation. Madmen who had escaped from somewhere, obtained possession of scientific secrets, and banded themselves together to overcome the world. If he could get the chance of a blow at them before he died!

He heard a door swing open—a door somewhere out on the prairie. Two men sprang into sudden visibility and approached him. There was nothing invisible about these men, though they had seemed to have materialized out of nothing. They wore the same black, trimly fitting uniform that Dick had seen in the White House. They were flesh and blood human beings like themselves.

"I congratulate you upon your recovery, Captain Rennell," remarked one of them with ironical politeness. "Also upon your shrewd coup. Needless to say, it had no chance of success, but we were misinformed as to the hour at which you might be expected. We thought it would take the fools at Washington a little longer to puzzle out our location—and then we did not put quite sufficient force into our hurricane. Quite an artificial one, Captain."

Dick, glaring at them, said nothing, and the one who had spoken turned to his companion, laughing, and said something in a foreign language that he did not recognize.

"His Majesty the Emperor commands your presence, and that of this old fool," said the first man. "Do not attempt to escape us. Death will be instantaneous." He drew a glass rod from his pocket, the tip of which glowed with a pale blue light.

AGAIN he spoke to his companion, who moved apparently a few feet distant out on the prairie. Suddenly Dick saw old Evans' chain slacken; then Dick's slackened too. He understood that he was unbound, though his wrists and ankles were still loosely fastened.

The second man took his station beside Luke Evans and motioned to him to rise. The first man beckoned to Dick to do the same. The two prisoners got upon their feet, trailing each a length of clanking chain. Each of the two guards covered his captive with the glass rod and motioned to him to precede him.

Choking with fury, Dick obeyed. He had taken a dozen steps with his guard uttered a sharp command to halt, at the same time shouting some word of command.

The edge of a door appeared, also seeming to materialize out of space. It widened, and Dick realized that he was looking at the unpainted inner side of a door whose outside was invisible. Beyond the door appeared a flight of steps.

Dick passed through and descended them. He counted fifteen. He emerged into a timbered underground passage, well lit with lamps, filled with what seemed to be mercury vapor. Behind him walked his guard; behind the guard he heard Luke Evans shambling. Both chains were clinking, and again Dick's fury almost overcame him.

He controlled himself. He had no hope or desire for life, but he meant to strike some sort of blow before he died, if it were possible.

They turned out of the timbered passage, Dick's guard now walking at his side, the glass rod menacing his back. Dick found himself in a large subterranean room, of extraordinary character. The walls were not merely timbered, but paneled. Pictures hung upon them, there were soft rugs underfoot, there was antique furniture. Everything was in plain sight.

THERE was a door at the farther end, from beyond which came the murmur of voices. Two guards in the same black uniform, but without the ornamental silver braid, stood to attention, long halberds in their hands. One spoke a challenge.

The guard at Dick's side answered. Two two men stepped backward, each about two feet, and pulled the two cords on either side of a curtain behind the open door. Dick passed through.

He stopped in sheer amazement. The gorgeousness of this larger room into which he entered was almost stupefying. It seemed to have been lifted bodily from some European palace. Mirrors with gilt edges ran along the side. On the floor was a single huge rug of Oriental weave.

At the farther end was a throne of gilt, lined with red velvet in which sat a man. An old man, of perhaps eighty years, with a grey peaked beard and fierce, commanding features. On his head was a gold crown glittering with gems. About him were gathered some twoscore men and a few women.

Those ranged on either side of the throne wore, like its occupant, robes of red, lined with ermine. The rank behind wore shorter robes, less decorative, but no less extraordinary. They might all have stepped out of some medieval court.

Behind this second line, and half-encircling them, were officers in the black uniform with the silver braid.

There had been chattering, but as Dick passed through into the room it was succeeded by complete silence. Dick fixed his eyes upon the old man on the throne.

He knew him! Knew him for a once famous European ruler who had lost his throne in the war. A man always of unbalanced mentality, who, after living for years in exile, had been reported dead three years before. A madman who had vanished to make this last attempt upon the world, aided and abetted by the secret group of

nobles who had surrounded him in the days of his pomp and power.

OLD men, all of those in the first line! Madmen too, perhaps, as madness begets madness. Behind them, younger men, infected by the strange malady, and enthusiastic for their desperate cause.

Yes, Dick knew this Invisible Emperor, lurking here in his underground palace. He knew Von Kettler, too, in the second line, close to the Emperor's throne. And, among the women in their robes, grouped picturesquely about that throne, he knew Fredegonde Valmy.

Dark-haired beneath her coronet, of radiant beauty, she fixed her eyes upon Dick's. Not a muscle of her face quivered.

Then only did Dick see something else, which he had not hitherto observed, owing to its concealment by the robes of those grouped about the Emperor, and the sight of it sent such a thrill of fury through him that he stood where he was, unable to speak or move a muscle.

The throne was set on a sort of dais, with three steps in front of it. The lowest of these steps was hollow. Within this hollow appeared the head and shoulders of a man.

An elderly man clothed in parti-colored red and yellow, the time-honored garment of court fools. He was on his hands and knees, and the round of his back fitted into the hollow of the step, and had a flat board over it, so that the Emperor, in ascending his throne, would place his foot upon it.

He was kept in that position with heavy chains of what looked like gold, which passed about his neck and arms, and fitted into heavy gold staples in the wood. And the old man was President Hargreaves of the United States!

THE President of the American Republic, chained as a footstool for the Invisible Emperor, the madman who defied the world. Dick stood petrified, staring into the mild face of the old man, still incapable of speech. Then a herald, carrying a long trumpet, to which a square banner was attached, strode forward from one side of the grotesque assemblage.

"Dog, on your knees when His Majesty deigns to admit you to the Presence!" he shouted.

The guard at Dick's side prodded him with his glass rod.

Then the storm of mad fury in Dick's heart released limbs and voice. The cry that came from his lips was like nothing human. He leaped upon the guard with a swift uppercut that sent him sprawling.

The glass rod slipped from his hands to the rug, striking the edge of his shoe, and broke to fragments. A single streak of fire shot from it, blasting a black streak across the Oriental rug.

Dick leaped toward the throne, and the assemblange, as if paralyzed by his sudden maneuver, remained watching him without moving. Then a woman screamed, and instantly the picturesque gathering had dissolved into a mob placing itself about the person of the Emperor, who sprang from his throne in agitation.

Dick was almost at the steps. But it was not at the Emperor that he leaped. He sprang to Hargreaves's side. "Mr. President, I'm an American," he babbled. "We've located this gang, we'll blow them off the face of the earth. In chains—God, in chains, sir—"

Dick stumbled over the length of his own chain that he had been dragging behind him—stumbled and fell prone upon the floor. Before he could regain his feet they were upon him.

A DOZEN men were holding him, despite his mad, frenzied struggles, and as, at length, he paused, exhausted, one of them, covering his head with a glass rod, looked up at the Emperor, who had resumed his seat.

Dick calmed himself. Still gripped, he straightened his body, and gave the mad monarch back look for look. For a moment the two men regarded each other. Then a peal of laughter broke from the Invisible Emperor's lips. And any one who heard that peal —any one save those accustomed to him—might have known that it was a madman's laughter.

He flung back his head and laughed, and the whole crowd laughed too. All those sycophants roared and chuckled —all except Fredegonde. It was not till afterward that Dick remembered that.

He stood up. "Dog of an American," he roared, "do you know why you were brought here? It was because I wanted one Yankee to live and see the irresistible powers that I exercise, so that he can go back and report on them to those fools in Washington who still think they can defy me, the messenger of the All-Highest.

"I tell you that the things I have done are nothing in comparison with the things that I have yet to do, if your insane government of pig-headed fools persists in its defiance. It is my plan to send you back to tell them that their President lies bound in gold chains as my footstool. That the hurricane which spread the gas through southern America was a mere summer zephyr in comparison with the storm that I shall send next.

"ALL the resources of Nature are at my comand, thanks to the illustrious chemists who have been secretly working for the past ten years to serve me. I, the All-Highest, have been commanded by the Almighty to scourge the world for its insolence in rejecting me, and especially the pig-race of Yankees whose pride has grown so great. Mine is the divinely appointed task to cast down your ridiculous democracies and re-establish the divine world-order of an Emperor and his nobility.

"That is why I have chosen to permit so mean a thing as you to live. As for the old fool beside you, who thought to stay my power with his box of tricks—his gas-box is already being analyzed by my chemists, and in a few hours the trivial secret will be at my disposal."

"And that's just where you're wrong," piped old Luke Evans in his cracked voice. "That gas can't be analyzed, because it contains an unknown isotope, and, as for yourself, you're nothing but a daft old fool, with your tinhorn trumpery!"

For a moment the Emperor stood like a statue, staring at old Luke. The expression on his face was that of a madman, but a madman through whose brain a straggling ray of realization has dawned. It was the look upon his face that held the whole assemblage spell-bound. Then suddenly came intervention.

Through a doorway in the side of the hall came one of the officers in black. He advanced to the foot of the throne and made a deep, hurried bow, speaking rapidly in some language incomprehensible to Dick.

The Emperor started, and then a peal of laughter left his lips.

"Pig of a Yankee," he shouted to Dick, "your contemptible navy is now approaching our shores, with a dirigible scout above it. You shall now see how I deal with such swine!"

CHAPTER X

The Tricks of the Trade

HE barked a command, and instantly Dick was seized by two of the guards, one of whom—the one Dick had knocked down—took the occasion to administer a buffeting in the precess of overcoming him. For the sight of the honored President of the United States—that kindly old man straining his eyes to meet Dick's own —in the parti-colored garb of red and yellow, and chained like a beast below the madman's throne, again filled Dick with a fury beyond all control.

It was only when he had been half-stunned again by the vicious blows of his captors, delivered with short truncheons of heavy wood, that at length he desisted from his futile struggle.

With swimming eyes he looked upon the gathering about the throne, which, again taking its cue from the madman, was roaring with laughter at his antics. And again Dick's eyes encountered those of Fredegonde Valmy.

The girl was not smiling. She was looking straight at him, and for a moment it seemed to Dick as if he read some message in her eyes.

Only for an instant that idea flashed through his mind. He was in no mood to receive messages. As he stood panting like a wild beast at bay, suddenly a filmy substance was thrown over his head from behind. Then, as his face emerged, and the rest of his body was swiftly enveloped, he realized what was happening.

They had thrown over him one of the invisible garments. He could feel the stuff about him, but he could no longer see his own body or limbs.

From his own ken, Dick Rennell had vanished utterly. Where his legs and feet should have been, there was only the rug, with the burn from the glass tube. He raised one arm and could not see arm or fingers.

In another moment invisible cords had been flung around him. Dick's efforts to renew the struggle were quickly cut short. Trussed helplessly, he could only stand glaring at the madman rocking with laughter upon his tinsel throne. Beside him, similarly bound, stood Luke Evans, but Dick was only conscious of the old man's presence by reason of the short, rasping, emphatic curses that broke from his lips.

THE Emperor turned on his throne and beckoned to Von Kettler, who approached with a deferential bow.

"Nobility, we charge you with the care of these two prisoners," he addressed him. "Have the old one removed to the laboratory, and give orders that he shall assist our chemists to the best of his power in their analysis of the black gas. As for the other, take him up to the central office, and show him how we deal with Yankees and all other pigs. Show him everything, so that he may take back a correct account of our irresistible powers when we dismiss him."

"Come!" barked one of the guards in Dick's ear.

Dick attempted no further resistance. Convinced of its futility, sick and reeling from the blows he had received, he accompanied his captors quietly. There was nothing more that he could do, either for President Hargreaves or for old Luke, but he still imagined the possibility of somehow warning the approaching fleet or the occupants of the dirigible.

He was led along the passage, past the guards, and up the stairs again. The top door opened upon vacancy; it closed, and vanished. Dick felt the rugs beneath his feet, but he was to all appearances standing on a square of bare earth in the middle of a prairie.

"Come!" barked the guard again, and Dick accompanied him, trailing his silver chain. Behind came Von Kettler.

"Here are steps!" said the guard, after they had proceeded a short distance.

Dick stumbled against the lowest step of an invisible flight. The breeze was cut off, showing that they had entered a building. Underneath was a large oval of bare ground. Dick found a handrail and groped his way up around a spiral staircase, four flights of it.

"Here is a room!"

DICK saw that widening edge of door again. The room inside was perfectly visible, though it seemed to be supported upon air. It was a spheroid, of huge size, with a number of large windows set into the walls, and

it was filled with machinery. About a dozen workmen in blue blouses were moving to and fro, attending to what appeared to be a number of enormous dynamos, but there were other apparatus of whose significance Dick was ignorant. The dynamos were whirring with intense velocity, but not the slightest sound was audible.

Von Kettler stepped to a switch attached to a stanchion of white metal, surmounted by a huge opaque glass dome, and threw it over. Instantly the hum and whir of machinery became audible, the sound of footsteps, the voices of the workmen, and the creak of boards beneath their feet.

"You see, we have discovered the means of destroying sound waves as well as shadows, and it was a much simpler feat," said Von Kettler with a sneer. Tell them that when you get back to Washington, Yankee pig. Also you might be interested to know that most of your bombs fell on camouflaged structures that we had erected with the intention of deceiving you."

He gestured to Dick to precede him, and halted him at a plain round iron pipe or rod that rose up through the floor and passed through the roof. It was surrounded by a mesh of fine wire. Attached to it were various gauges, with dials showing red and black numbers.

"This is perhaps our greatest achievement, swine," remarked Von Kettler affably. "You shall see its operations from above." He pointed to a narrow spiral staircase rising at the far end of the room. "It is the practical application of Einstein's gravitation and electricity in field relation. It is by means of this, and the three dynamos on the ground, that we were able to neutralize your engines last night and bring them down where we wanted them. You must be sure to tell the Washington hogs about that."

HE motioned to Dick to cross the room and ascend the spiral staircase. Following him, he flung another switch similar to the first one, and instantly all sound within the room was cut off.

They ascended the winding flight and emerged upon a floor or platform. Dick felt it under his feet, but he could see nothing except the ground, far beneath him. He seemed to be suspended in the void. He stopped, groping, hesitating to advance. Von Kettler's jarring laugh grated on his ears.

"Don't be afraid, swine," he jeered. "This place is enclosed. There is a shadow-breaking device on every floor, which renders us complete masters of camouflage."

A switch snapped. Dick found himself instantly in a rotunda, roofed with glass, sections of which were raised to a height of three or four feet from the wooden base, admitting a gentle breeze. Three of four men were moving about in it, but these wore the black uniform with the silver braid, and Von Kettler's manner was deferential as he addressed them, jerking his hand contemptuously toward Dick. Grins of derision and malice appeared on all the faces.

Save one, an elderly officer, apparently of high rank, who came forward and raised his hand to the salute.

"Captain Rennell," he said, "we are at war with your nation, but we are also, I hope, gentlemen." He turned to Von Kettler. "Is it seemly," he asked, "that an officer of the American army should be brought here in chains and cords?"

"Excellency, it is His Majesty's command," responded Von Kettler, with a servile smirk that hardly concealed his elation. "Moreover, the American is to witness the forthcoming destruction of the Yankee fleet."

The elderly officer reddened, turned away without replying. Dick looked about him.

THERE was less machinery in this room. The iron pillar that he had seen came through the floor and terminated some five feet above it in another of the opaque glass domes, filled

with iridescent fire. About it was a complicated arrangement of dials and gauges.

In the centre of the room was a sort of camera obscura. A large hood projected above a flat table, and an officer was half-concealed beneath it, apparently studying the table busily.

"Come, American, you shall see your navy on its way to destruction," said Von Kettler, beckoning Dick within the hood.

The officer stepped from the table, whose top was a sheet of silvered glass, leaving Von Kettler and Dick in front of it. Dick looked. At first he could see nothing but the vast stretch of sea; then he began to make out tiny dots at the table's end, terminating in minute blurs that were evidently smoke from the funnels.

"Your ships," said Von Kettler, smiling. "This is the dirigible." He pointed to another dot that came into sight and disappeared almost instantly. "They are a hundred and fifty miles away. Explain to your friends in Washington that our super-telescopic sights are based upon a refraction of light that overcomes the earth's curvature. It is simple, but it happens not to have been worked out until my Master commanded it."

Dick watched those tiny dots in fascination, mentally computing. At an average speed of fifty knots an hour, the squadron's steaming rate, they should be off the coast within three hours. The dirigible would take two, if it went ahead to scout, as was almost certain.

DICK stepped back from beneath the hood and glanced about him. If only his arms were not bound, he might do enough damage within a few seconds to put the deadlier machinery out of commission, if only the silvered mirror. He glanced about him. Von Kettler, interpreting his thought, smiled coolly.

"You are helpless, my dear Yankee pig," he said. "But there is more to see. Oblige me by accompanying me up to the top story."

He pointed to a ladder running up beside the iron pillar through an opening in the roof, and Dick, with a shrug of the shoulders, complied. He emerged upon a small platform, apparently protruding into vacancy. Far underneath he saw the clearing, and two airplanes on the tarmac, the aviators looking like beetles from that height. He looked out to sea and saw no signs of the fleet.

"You have heard of St. Simeon Stylites, Yankee?" purred Von Kettler. "The gentleman who spent forty years of his life upon a tall pillar, in atonement for his sins? It is His Majesty's desire that you spend, not forty years, but two or three hours up here, meditating upon his grandeur, before returning to earth. It is also possible that you will witness something of considerable interest. Look out to sea!"

Dick turned his head involuntarily. He heard Von Kettler's laugh, heard the snap of a switch—then suddenly he was alone in the void.

At that snap of the switch, everything had vanished from view behind him, the building, even the platform on which he stood. His feet seemed to rest on nothing. Yet below him he could still see the airplanes, and more being wheeled out.

A SENSE of extreme physical nausea overcame him. He reeled, then managed to steady himself. He, too, was invisible to his own eyes. Involuntarily he cried out. No sound came from his lips. He stood there, invisible in an invisible, soundless void.

For what seemed an unending period he occupied himself with endeavoring to obtain the sense of balance. Then, with a great effort, he managed to loosen the cords that bound his right arm to his side. A mighty wrench, and he had slipped them up above his elbow. His right lower arm was free.

He extended it cautiously, and his hand encountered a railing. Instantly he felt more at ease. He began moving slowly around in a widening circle, and discovered that the platform was enclosed. The further side was, however, open, and he began sliding forward, foot by foot, to locate himself. Once his foot slipped over the edge, and he drew back hastily. He felt on the other side, and discovered that he was upon what seemed a plank walk, perhaps a hundred and fifty feet above the ground, with no rail on either side, and some six feet wide.

Very cautiously he shuffled his way along it. It was solid enough, although invisible, but more than once Dick walked perilously close to one edge or the other. At length he went down on his hands and knees, and proceeded, crawling, until his movements were arrested by what was unmistakably a door.

The plank bridge, then, connected the top stories of two buildings, but what the second was, there was no means of knowing. The door was barred on the other side, and did not yield an iota to Dick's cautious pressure. Dick felt the frame. Beyond was glass, reinforced with iron on the outside, the latter metal forming a sort of lattice work. Cautiously Dick began to crawl up the rounded dome.

FOOT by foot he made his way, clinging to the iron bars, until he felt that he had reached the point of the dome's maximum convexity. He wedged his feet against a bar and rested. Only now was it brought home to him that it would be impossible for him to find his way back to the plank.

A long time must have passed, for, looking out to sea, he could see the squadron now, minute points on the horizon, exuding smudges of smoke. The dirigible was still invisible. The airplanes had either left the tarmac or had been wrapped in the gas-impregnated cloth, for both they and the aviators had vanished.

Suddenly Dick had an odd sensation that the iron was growing warm.

In another moment or two he had no doubt of it. The iron bar he clutched was distinctly warm; it was growing hot. He shifted his grasp to the adjacent bar and even in that moment the heat had increased perceptibly.

Suddenly there came a vibration, a sense of movement. Dick was being swung outward. The whole dome seemed to be dropping into space. He dug his feet and fingers under the hot rods, and felt himself sliding over on his back.

Back—back, till he was lying horizontally in space, and clutching desperately at the iron bar, which was growing hotter every moment.

The sliding movement ceased. It was as if the whole upper section of the glass dome had opened outward. But the heat of the bars was becoming unbearable, and gusts of hot air seemed to be proceeding from within.

Hot or not, Dick's only alternative was to work his way back to the stable portion of the dome, or to frizzle until he dropped through space.

Clinging desperately to the bars, he began working back, reaching from bar to bar with his right hand and dragging his feet, with the clanking chain attached, from bar to bar also.

HOW he gained the base of the dome he was never able afterward to understand. The heat had grown intolerable; his hands were blistering. Somehow he reached it. He rested a moment despite the heat. But to find the plank walk was clearly impossible. In another minute he must drop. Better that than to fry there like St. Lawrence on his griddle.

And then, just when he had resigned himself to that last drop, there came an unexpected diversion. Almost beside him a window was flung back. A man looked out. Dick saw one of the workmen in the blue blouses, and, behind him, within the dome, what seemed like an empty room.

Dick was slightly above the man. As his head and shoulders appeared, he let himself go, landing squarely across his back. He slid down his shoulders through the open window into the interior of the dome.

The man, flung against the frame of the window by the shock, uttered a piercing cry. Before he could recover his stand, or take in what had happened to him, Dick had gained his feet and leaped upon him. His right hand closed upon his throat. He bore him to the floor and choked him into insensibility.

CHAPTER XI

In the Laboratory

NOT until the man's struggles had ceased, and he lay unconscious, panting, and blue in the face, did Dick release him. Then he looked about him.

Save for the workman, he was alone in a rotunda, open to the sky, and, as he had supposed, the whole upper portion of the dome had been flung back, leaving an immense aperture into which the sun was shining, flecking the interior with shafts of light. The temperature, despite the opening of the dome, must have been in excess of a hundred and twenty-five degrees.

There was nothing except an immense central shaft, up which ran a hollow pole of glass, cut off by the invisible paint at the summit of the dome. The inside of this glass pole was glowing with colored fires, and it was from this that the intolerable heat came, though its function Dick could not imagine.

One thing was clear: it was growing hotter each moment. To remain in that rotunda meant death within a brief period of time.

And there was no way out! Dick glared around him, searching the glass walls in vain. No semblance of a stairway or ladder, even. Yet the workman must have entered by some ingress—if only Dick could discover it!

He began running round the interior of the dome in the brilliant sunshine, searching frantically for that ingress. And it was growing hotter! The sweat was pouring down his face beneath the invisible garment.

Dick was vaguely aware that the silence switch had been thrown in the room, for his feet made no sound, but the knowledge was latent in his mind. Two or three times he circumnavigated the interior of the dome, like a rat in a trap.

Then suddenly he saw a section of the flooring rise in a corner, and a workman in a blue blouse appear out of the trap door.

HE stood there, his face muscles working as he shouted for his companion, but no sound came from his lips. He looked about him, and saw the unconscious man beside the window. He started in his direction.

With a shout, Dick hurled himself toward him. And he checked himself even as he was about to leap. For he realized that the second workman neither saw nor heard him.

Yet some subconscious impression of danger must have reached his mind, for the workman stopped too, instinctively assuming an attitude of defense. Dick gathered a dozen links of his wrist-chain in his right hand, leaped and struck.

The workman crumpled to the floor, a little thread of blood creeping from his right temple.

It was the thing upon which Dick looked back afterward with less satisfaction than any other, leaving the two unconscious men in that room of death. Yet there was nothing else he could have done. He ran to the trap, and saw a ladder leading down. In a moment he had swung himself through and closed the trap behind him.

The material that lined the walls below must have had almost perfect insulating qualities, for the temperature here was no hotter than in the Bahamas on a hot summer day. Dick

scrambled down the ladder and found himself in a machine-shop. Nobody was there, and tools of all sorts were lying about, as well as machinery whose purpose he did not understand. A pair of heavy pliers and a vise were sufficient to rid Dick of his wrist and ankle chains in a minute or two. With a knife he slashed the cords of invisible stuff that bound him. He stood up, cramped, but free.

He picked up an iron bar that was lying loose on a table beside a machine, and advanced to the staircase in one corner of the shop. As he approached it, another workman came running up.

DICK stood aside in an embrasure in the wall partly occupied by a machine. The man passed within two feet of him and never saw him. Only then did Dick quite realize that he was actually invisible.

The moment the man had passed him, Dick ran to the staircase. He descended one flight; he was half way down another when a yell of pain and imprecation came to his ears. He knew that voice: it was Luke Evans's!

With three bounds Dick reached the bottom of the stairs. He saw a large room in front of him. No mistaking the nature of this room; it was an ordinary laboratory, fitted out with the greatest elaboration, and divided into two parts by paneling. And sight and sound were on.

In the part nearer Dick three men were grouped about a large dynamo, which was sending out a high, musical note as it spun. Levers and dials were all about it, and above it was the base of the glass tube that Dick had seen above. In the other part were five or six men. Three of them were testing some substance at a table; three more were gathered about old Luke Evans, whose silver chains had been removed and replaced by ropes, which bound his limbs, and also bound him to a heavy chair, which seemed to be affixed to the ground. One of the three had a piece of metal in a pair of long-handled pliers. It was white hot, and a white electric spark that shot to and fro between two terminals close by, showed where it had been heated.

Dick started: he recognized one of the three men as Von Kettler. He moved slowly forward, very softly, his feet making no sound on the fiber matting that covered the floor.

"DID that feel good, American swine?" asked Von Kettler softly, and Dick saw, with horror, a red weal on the old man's forehead. "Now you are perhaps in a more gracious mood, Professor? The unknown isotope in that black gas of yours—you are disposed to give us the chemical formula?"

"I'll see you in hell first," raved old Luke Evans, writhing in his chair.

Von Kettler turned to the man holding the white-hot metal, and nodded. But at that moment a door behind Evans's chair opened, and Fredegonde Valmy appeared in the entrance. Von Kettler turned hastily, snatched the pliers from the man's hand, and laid the metal in a receptacle.

But the girl had seen the action. She looked at the weal on Luke's forehead, and clenched her hands; her eyes dilated with horror.

"You have been torturing him, Hugo!" she cried.

"Freda, what are you doing in here? Oblige me by withdrawing immediately!" cried Von Kettler.

"Where is Captain Rennell?" the girl retorted. "I will know!"

"He is upstairs, watching the approaching Yankee fleet, and waiting to see its destruction," returned the other.

"You are lying to me! He has been killed, and this old man has been tortured!" cried Fredegonde. "I tell you, Hugo Von Kettler, you are no longer a half-brother of mine! I am through with you!"

"Unfortunately," sneered Von Kettler, "it is not possible to dispose of a family relationship so easily."

"IT is cheap to sneer," the girl retorted. "But you sang a very different song when you were in the penitentiary, in terror of death, and you begged me to come and throw you the invisible robe through the bars. You promised me then that you would abandon this mad enterprise and come away with me. You swore it!"

"I have sworn allegiance to my Emperor, and that comes first," retorted Von Kettler. "Oblige me by retiring."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," cried the girl hysterically. "When you used me as a tool in your enterprises in Washington, you played upon my patriotism for my conquered country. I thought I was undertaking a heroic act. I didn't dream of the villainy, the cold-blooded murder that was to be wrought.

"You've kept me here virtually a prisoner," she went on, with rising violence, "an attendant upon that old madman, your Emperor, and his sham court, while more murder is being planned. Where is Captain Rennell, I say?" She stamped her foot. "I demand that he and this old man be set at liberty at once. Hugo," she pleaded, "come away with me. Don't you see what the end must be? This is no heroic enterprise, it is wholesale murder that will arouse the conscience of civilized mankind against you! Order that the vortex- ray be turned off," she went on, looking through the opening in the partition toward the dynamo. "That gas—you cannot be so vile as to send it forth again, to destroy the American ships?"

"My dear Freda," retorted the young man coolly, "the vortex-ray is already charged with the gas, and at a height of twenty thousand feet it is now creating a vacuum that will send the gas upon the wings of a hurricane straight up the Atlantic seaboard. It will obliterate every living thing on board the battleships, from man to rats, and this time we mean to reach New York.

"As for that swine Rennell," he went on, "you heard His Majesty announce his intention of sending him back to Washington with the information of our irresistible power. Of course I know you are in love with him, and that these qualms of conscience are due to that circumstance."

BUT Dick hardly heard the latter part of Von Kettler's remarks. Suddenly the significance of the dynamo and the superheated room above had come home to him. He had read of such a project years before, in some newspaper, and had forgotten about it until that moment.

By sending a high-tension current almost to the limits of the earth's atmosphere, the article had said, a vortex or vacuum could be set up which would create a hurricane.

The tremendous pressure of the inrushing air would make a veritable cyclone, which, taking the course of the prevailing winds, would rush forth on a mission of widespread disaster.

And on this hurricane would go the deadly gas, infinitely diluted, and yet deadly to all life in its infinitesimal proportion to the atmosphere.

And the American fleet was now approaching the Bahama shores.

Dick forgot Luke Evans, everything else, as the significance of that mechanism in the next room came home to him. He ran like a madman through the space in the partition, and, raising the bar aloft, brought it thudding down upon the dials, twisting and warping them.

He struck at the hollow pole, but, glass or not, it defied all his efforts. He seized a heavy lever and flung it into reverse—and two others.

Yelling, the three attendants broke and ran. Out of the laboratory the six came running, collided with the three. Behind them Dick could see Fredegonde Valmy, a knife in her hand, slashing at Luke Evans's bonds.

Dick swung his bar and brought it crashing down on a head, felling the man like a log. He saw Von Kettler pull one of the glass rods from his

pocket and fire blindly. The discharge struck a second attendant, and the man dropped screeching, his clothes ablaze.

Somebody yelled, "He's there! Look at his eyes!" and pointed at Dick's face.

DICK leaped aside and swung the rod again, felling a third man. The others turned and ran, Von Kettler in the van, broke through the door behind Luke Evans's chair, and disappeared.

Dick ran back to where the old man was standing beside the girl, the discarded ropes at his feet. He flung his hood back. "Luke, don't you know me?" he shouted.

It was creditable to Luke Evans's composure that, though Dick must have presented the aspect of nothing more than a face floating in the air, he retained his composure.

"Sure I know you, Rennell," replied the old man. "And you and me's going to best them devils yet."

"But the fleet—it's approaching Abaco," Dick cried. "I've got to warn them."

Fredegonde seized him by the arm.

"Come with me," she cried. "If they find you here, they'll kill you."

Dick hesitated only a moment, then followed the girl as she dashed for another door on the same side of the laboratory as that by which Von Kettler and his men had fled. They dashed down the staircase, and a corridor disclosed itself at the bottom. The girl stopped.

"There is a private way—the Emperor's," she panted. "He had it constructed—in case of necessity. I got the keys. I was planning—something desperate—to stop these murders; I didn't know what."

Dick seized her by the arm. "What keys?" he demanded. "The key to the place where President Hargreaves is?"

"Yes, but—"

"We must get him. Where is he?"

"In a cell beneath the throne room. That's overhead. But they'll catch us—"

"Which is the key?" asked Dick.

The girl produced three or four keys, fumbled with them, handed one to Dick. "This way!" she cried.

THEY ran along the corridor. Two guards appeared, moving toward them under the electric lights. At the sight of the girl running, and Luke Evans, they stopped in surprise.

Dick had pulled the hood back over his head. He ran toward them, wielding the iron bar. A mighty swing sent the two toppling over, one unconscious, the other bruised and yelling loudly.

"Here! Here!" gasped Fredegonde, stopping before a door.

Dick fitted the key to the lock and turned it. Inside, upon a quite visible bed, sat President Hargreaves, unchained. He looked up inquiringly as the three entered.

"Mr. President," said Dick, throwing back his hood, "I'm an American officer, and I want to save you. There's not much chance, but, if you'll come with me—"

Hargreaves got up and smiled. "I'm not a military man, sir," he answered, "but I'm ready to take that chance rather than—"

He did not complete the sentence. Shouts echoed along the corridor behind them. Dick replaced his hood, handed the keys back to the girl. "Take Mr. Hargreaves to any place of temporary safety you can," he said. "And Mr. Evans. I'll hold them!"

"It's right here. This door!" panted the girl, indicating a door at the end of the passage.

The three ran toward it. Dick turned. Five or six guards with Von Kettler at their head, were running toward him. They saw the three fugitives and set up a shout.

Dick had a quick inspiration. He dashed back into the cell, seized the light bed, and dragged it through the doorway into the passage, just in time

to send Von Kettler and two others sprawling. He brought down the bar upon the head of one of them, shouting as he did so.

Then he became aware that the passage was flooded with sunshine. Fredegonde had got the door open.

He darted back, passed through in the wake of the three, and slammed it shut. Fredegonde turned the key. Instantly Dick found himself with his three companions upon the prairie. Not a vestige of the buildings was apparent anywhere, except for the patches of brown earth.

CHAPTER XII

Von Kettler's End

FREDEGONDE took command, repressing her agitation with a visible effort. "They cannot break down that door," she said, "and they dare not ask for another key. It will take them a minute or two to go back and reach us around the building. But there may be a score of people watching us. Let us walk quietly toward the thickets. If I am present, they will not suspect anything is wrong."

But Dick stood still, driven into absolute immobility by the conflicting claims of duty. For overhead, high in the blue, was an American dirigible.

And at his side was the President of the United States. One or other of them he must sacrifice.

He chose. He ran forward without answering. Those squares of brown earth, set side by side, were the airplane hangars, and he meant to seize an airplane, if he could find one beneath its coat of invisibility, and fly to warn the dirigible and the fleet.

A curious wind was blowing. It seemed to come swirling downward, as no wind that Dick had ever known. It was growing in violence each moment, beating upon his face.

As he ran, he was aware of Luke beside him. He heard shouting all about them. Luke had been seen. Not only Luke, but Hargreaves, who was running after Luke, with Fredegonde trying in vain to change his intentions. At the edge of the first brown patch Dick collided violently with the wall of the invisible hangar, and went reeling back. The shouts were growing louder.

"Wait!" gasped Luke Evans. He had something like a large watch in his hand. He held it out like a pistol, and from it projected a beam of the black gas.

Then Dick remembered Colonel Stopford's words: "He showed me a watch and said the salvation of the world was inside the case. I thought him insane."

INSANE or not, old Luke Evans had concealed the tiny model of the camera-box to good purpose. As he swept the black beam around him, the whole mass of buildings sprang into luminosity, the figures of a score of men, grouped together, and advancing in a threatening mass, some distance away—and more.

Two airplanes, standing side by side upon the tarmac, just in front of the hangar— not mere pursuit planes, but six-seaters, formidably armed, with central turrets and bow and rear guns, and propellers revolving.

Two mechanics stood staring in the direction of the little group.

"I'm with you," gasped Hargreaves. "I'm not a military man, but I've got fighting blood, and I come of a fighting race."

Dick leaped and once more swung the iron bar. The nearer of the two mechanics went down like lead, the second, seeing his companion bludgeoned out of the air, turned and ran.

Dick shouted, pointing. Fredegonde jumped into the plane, and the President scrambled in behind her. The group, dismayed by the black beam, which Luke Evans was now turning steadily upon them, had halted irresolutely. But suddenly a head appeared, moving swiftly through the air toward the plane. It was Von Kettler, with

hood flung back, the face distorted with rage and fury.

At his yells, the whole crowd started forward. Dick leaped into the central cockpit, swung the helicopter lever. Something spitted past his face, and a long streak appeared on the turret, where the gas-paint had been scored. But he was rising, rising into that increasing wind. . . .

HE heard a yell of triumph behind him. And that yell of Von Kettler's was his undoing. There is the telepathy between close friends, but there is also telepathic sympathy between enemies, and in an instant Dick understood what that shout of triumph portended.

He was rising into the line of magnetic force that would anchor his airplane helplessly, and leave it to be jerked down and held at Von Kettler's mercy.

He released the helicopter lever and opened throttle wide. For an instant the heavy plane hung dangerously at its low elevation, threatening to nose over. Then Dick regained control, and was winging away toward the sea, while yells of baffled fury from behind indicated the chagrin of his enemies.

He glanced up. Thank heaven the dirigible had not approached the trap. It was apparently circling overhead. Of course the observers had seen nothing, had no conception that the headquarters of the Invisible Empire lay below.

And yet it seemed to be drifting aimlessly back toward the fleet—erratically, as if not under complete control. And Dick could see the ships about a mile offshore, apparently drifting too. They were moving as no American squadron ever moved since the day the first hull was launched, for some of them, turned bow inward toward others, seemed upon the point of collision, while others were lagging on the edge of the formation, as if pointing for home.

Then suddenly the awful truth dawned upon Dick. The occupants of ships and dirigible alike had been overcome by the deadly gas.

DICK banked, turned, leaned forward and shouted to Luke Evans, and, when the old man turned his head, indicated to him to sweep the tarmac with his ray.

The thread of black, broadening into a truncated cone, revealed nothing save the luminous outlines of the buildings. Apparently the tarmac was deserted. It was queer, too, that the silence of the night before was gone. Dick shouted again, to assure himself of what he knew already, and heard his own voice again.

Something had happened, something unexpected—or perhaps the crew of the Invisible Emperor, satisfied with the effects of the deadly gas, had not thought it necessary to go to any further trouble.

Suddenly Dick discovered that he was almost within the circle of the line of magnetic force. Hurriedly he threw over the stick and kicked rudder. It was not till he was again approaching the seashore that it occurred to him that the force, too, was not in operation.

He opened throttle wide and shot seaward. He must ascertain what had happened, and, if not too late, give warning without delay.

Then suddenly the vicious rattle of gunfire sounded in Dick's ears, and, materializing out of the sky, came Von Kettler's face. Startled for an instant, Dick quickly realized that it was Von Kettler in his plane, with his hood thrown back.

And Dick realized that his own hood was thrown back. Two faces and nothing else, were the whole visible setting for battle.

But that look upon Von Kettler's face was even more demoniacal than before. Mad with rage at the prospective escape of his prey, and infuriated by his half-sister's appearance in the plane, Von Kettler had thrown all cau-

tion to the winds. In his insane hatred he was prepared to shoot down Dick's plane and send Fredegonde to destruction with it.

IF Dick chose to replace his hood, he would have the madman at his mercy. And, if he had thought about it, he would have done so, with Fredegonde sitting behind him. But the idea did not enter his mind. Consumed with rage almost equal to Von Kettler's, he only saw there the face of one of those who had inflicted an unspeakable outrage upon the President of his country.

The memory of old Hargreaves, chained before the mock-Emperor's throne, enraged Dick more than the holocaust of lives taken by the assassins.

He shouted a wild answer to Von Kettler's challenge as his plane sped by, and banked. At that moment there came a roaring concussion that shook the plane from prop to tail.

Dick turned his head. Somehow, President Hargreaves, had contrived to get the rear gun into action, and now he was staring at it as if he could not believe that he had fired it.

And that action heartened Dick wonderfully. As Von Kettler's face appeared again, he loosed his turret gun in a sweeping blast, and heard Von Kettler's gun roar futilely.

Again they crossed each other's path, and again and again, two faces, only able to gauge roughly the position of their planes. Neither man had succeeded in injuring the other.

Once old Luke turned his black ray upon Von Kettler, and for a moment the plane stood out luminously in the blackness, but Dick leaned forward and yelled to the old man to desist.

And once Dick looked back and saw Fredegonde crouched in her cockpit with eyes wide with terror. And yet he read in her eyes the same determination she had expressed in the the laboratory. She was through with her half-brother.

ALL this while the wind had been increasing, making it difficult to maneuver the heavy plane; but now, of a sudden there came a dead lull, and then, with a whining sound, the wind rushed in again.

But this was a wind still more unlike any that Dick had ever known. A mighty gale that revolved circularly, but downward too, like a vortex, catching the plane and sweeping it into an ever tightening circle.

A man-made gale, upon whose wings the poison gas would spread northward again, carrying unlimited destruction with it. Dick fought in vain to free himself.

He was revolving as in a whirlpool, and it required the utmost presence of mind and watchfulness to hold the plane steady. Round and round he spun—and then, suddenly, out of the void materialized Von Kettler's face.

Von Kettler, helpless too, was spinning round upon the opposite side of the vortex. Thus each airship was upon the tail of the other, and it was a matter of chance which would get the other within the ringsights of the turret gun.

Von Kettler was so near that his shouts of fury came fitfully to Dick's ears as the wind carried them. Dick, working the controls, knew that not for an instant could he direct his attention from them in order to fire his gun, and the moment Von Kettler attempted to do so, he was doomed.

Round and round, struggling, battling in vain—and once more the concussion of the rear gun shook the plane. And a shout from the President reached Dick's ears.

Dick turned his head for an instant, long enough to see Von Kettler spinning down through the vortex. And he was going down afire. President Hargreaves, "no military man," had got him, the second time he had ever aligned a gun-barrel upon a target.

"Bravo, sir, bravo!" Dick shouted.

And desperately he flung the stick forward and nosed down.

NO gale, man-made or heaven-made, could carry on its wings three-quarters of a ton of armored, turreted airship. Swirling like a leaf, the plane broke through the clutch of the blast. Instantly it grew calm. Outside that vortex, hardly a breath of air was stirring. It was as if the whole fury of the air was concentrated within that circle.

The ground came rushing up. Once more Dick tried to head seaward. With flying speed lost, he was calculating the exact moment in his downward rush when he could hope to resume control. Would that moment come before he crashed?

At less than a hundred feet he partly regained control. For a moment the plane seemed to fly on an even keel. Then her nose went down as her speed slackened. And this time there was no salvation.

Working desperately to save her, Dick saw the ground loom up before him. He heard the crash as the plane broke into splintering ruin . . . he had a last vision of old Luke clutching his precious watch; then everything was dissolved in darkness. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

You Can't Down the Marines

"HE'S pulling out of it! Keep it up, Gotch!"

Dick heard the words and opened his eyes. He stared in amazement at the faces about him. Honest American faces under tropical helmets and above a uniform that he had never expected to see again. It couldn't be real. And yet it was. One word broke from his lips:

"Marines!"

"He's got it. Don't let him slip, Gotch," grinned one of the friendly faces, and the man named Gotch, who presumably had some qualifications for his job, continued what was meant to be a gentle massage of the nerve centers along Dick's spine.

"I'm all right," Dick muttered, beginning to realize his surroundings. He was lying on a strip of prairie near the beach, on which the waves were breaking in low ripples about a motor-boat that was drawn up.

HE sat up. The world was swimming about him, but he seemed to have no broken bones. Not far away was the wrecked plane, an incongruous mass of streaks where the fabric had ripped through the gas-paint. "Where are—the others?" Dick muttered.

Then he was aware of Fredegonde Valmy lying with a white face under a shrub. Her eyes were open, and turned toward him.

He heard Luke Evans's voice. The old man hobbled round from Dick's back, one arm in a bandage.

"She's hurt rather bad, Rennell, but we won't know how bad till we can get her away," he said. "You've been lying here about an hour, since we crashed. President Hargreaves made them take him to the fleet in the other motor-boat to see what he could do. He's assumed command.

"You see, Rennell, that damn gas caught the fleet and put pretty near every man out of commission for good. But these fellows wasn't going to give up. So, since all their officers were gone, they took two of the boats and their arms and equipment, and came ashore to settle accounts. And they won't believe there's anybody on the island, or any buildings. And I can't make 'em believe it. God, Rennell, those invisible devils may attack us at any moment. I don't understand what they're waiting for."

Gotch spoke: "We know you're Captain Rennell, sir, and this gentleman, we know him too, but he seems a bit queer in his head. Talking of the Invisible Emperor's headquarters on this island, a mile or so inland. The only invisible thing we've found is that piece of a garment we pulled off you."

"I broke my watch ray machine in the fall, and I can't make them believe,

Rennell," almost wept old Evans. "Tell them I'm not crazy."

DICK got upon his feet with an effort, staggered a little, then made his way to Fredegonde. He kneeled down beside the girl. She was conscious, and smiled faintly, but she could not speak. He pressed her hand, rose, and came back. "Mr. Evans is not crazy," he said. "The headquarters of the gang is over there." He pointed. "Didn't President Hargreaves tell you?"

"He was kind of incoherent, sir." The marines looked at one another, wondering. Was Captain Rennell crazy too?

"We've had scouts out through the jungle, sir. There's nothing within five miles of here. They had a clear view through to the sea from the top of a hill."

"I've been there." Dick spoke with conviction. "I must tell you they've got devices that make them practically irresistible. That gas and other things. And they're invisible. But if you boys are willing to follow me, I'll lead you. It means death. I don't know what they're waiting for. But—are you willing to follow me?"

"We'll follow you, sir"—after a pause, during which Dick read in their eyes the desire to humor a crazy man. "We'll follow to hell, sir—if that gang's really there."

"Take your arms, then!" Dick pointed to the stacked rifles.

A minute later the twenty-odd Marines, forming an open line that extended from one side of the clearing to the other, were on their way toward the headquarters of the gang. And Dick, leading them, though his head was reeling, felt as if his own reason was slipping from him. Had he only dreamed all this? Was it possible that the headquarters of the Invisible Emperor existed on this desolate prairie? If it was true, why had they suddenly become silent, inert? Why had they not long ago wiped out these few Marines? And the gale—was it now sweeping northward on its mission of destruction?

HALF an hour passed. Then the brown patches of the foundations came into view upon the open ground. Here were the hangers, here was the central building with the Emperor's headquarters. And nothing was visible, nothing stirred, yet at any moment Dick expected the rattle of machine-gun bullets or some more terrific method of destruction.

"Halt!" The line stood still. "I am going forward ahead of you. You'll follow at a distance of twenty paces. When you see me stop, feel for the door in the wall, and if I disappear, follow me. You understand?"

The Marines assented cheerfully. No harm in humoring this poor devil of an officer who had crashed and lost his wits. Like Luke Evans, shambling up through the line to Dick's side. Dick advanced. At any moment now the concentrated fire of the Emperor's men should blast them all to smithereens. Nothing happened.

And it was no dream, for Dick's outstretched hand encountered the exterior wall of the building. He had gauged his way accurately, too, for a step or two brought him to the door. He stepped inside. He was inside the private door that led to the Emperor's quarters, through which he had passed with Fredegonde, Hargreaves, and Luke Evans in their flight. It had been broken down, contrary to the girl's predictions, and the deserted passage within was perfectly visible to them all.

Stupefied, the Marines bumped and jostled with each other as they crowded in. If they had been anything but Marines, their own heads might have been turned at the discovery of this sudden materialization of a building out of nothingness.

Being Marines, they only grinned sheepishly, and followed along the corridor.

THE first human being they saw was one of the guards, in a black tunic. He was leaning against a wall, and he was a human being no longer. He looked as if he was asleep, but he was stone dead, with a placid look on his face.

Two more dead guards lay across each other, with smiles on their faces; and there was a workman in a blue blouse who had been in a tremendous hurry to get somewhere, from his appearance, and had never got there. He had fallen asleep instead, and never wakened.

Dick found a stairway and led the way up. He thought it ran up to the laboratory, but, instead, the room into which he emerged was the ante-room of the Invisible Emperor's audience hall. Six dead guards lay in a heap in front of the curtain, and they had died as unconcerned as their fellows, to judge by the pacific expressions on their faces.

Dick passed through into the throne room. The Marines, behind him, for the first time uttered exclamations of awe—of pity.

The terrific scene that met Dick's eyes would be burned into his brain till his last day.

Upon his throne, head flung back, sat the Invisible Emperor, his features set in a sardonic leer of death. And all about him, some sitting, some lying, supporting one another, were his court, officers in black uniforms with the silver braid, and women in court dress. And all were dead too. But they had not known they had died. They had fallen asleep—upon the instant that their own volatile gas reached them.

I GUESS that's the explanation, sir," said old Luke Evans. "Those devils made that whirlwind and charged it with the gas. But when you reversed that lever, you reversed the process. Instead of projecting the force outwardly, you made a suction, and every atom of the gas that hadn't travelled beyond the radius came rushing back and filled the building. If we'd entered a half-hour later, we'd have been dead ones ourselves, but the gas was volatile enough to disperse through the chinks and crannies. Anyway, it's all over now."

Yes, it was all over, Dick thought, as he sat in his deck chair upon the cruiser that was bearing him northward. The menace to world government had been destroyed and with it all who had been behind it. There would be a new order in the world, a new and kindlier government. Men would feel closer to one another than in the past. Half the personnel of the fleet had escaped the invisible death, and only one cruiser and the dirigible had been lost in the confusion. There would be a great reception when they put into Charleston.

Dick bent over Fredegonde, who was asleep in her chair beside him. The ship's surgeon had promised recovery for her. She shouldn't suffer for her half-voluntary part in the business, Dick said to himself. It was going to be his task to help her to forget.

Everyone Is Invited
To "Come Over in
'THE READERS' CORNER'!"

The gaping mouth jerked forward.

Prisoners on the Electron

By Robert H. Leitfred

THE blood-red glow of a slanting sun bathed the towers of New York's serrated skyline, then dropped into a molten sea beyond the winter horizon. Friday, the last day of Jupiter, the thirteenth month of the earth's new calendar, had drawn to a close. In a few hours the year of 1999 would end—at midnight, to be exact.

Fate throws two young Earthians into desperate conflict with the primeval monsters of an electron's savage jungles.

Far below the towers stretched well lighted canyons teeming with humanity. At an upper level where once the elevated trains had roared and rumbled in an antiquated period long past, an orderly mass of workers and shoppers was borne at an incredible speed from lower Manhattan to towering apartments that stretched northward to Peekskill. The northbound traffic was heaviest at this hour and the moving sidewalk bands were jammed to their capacity.

Street cars, now obsolete, had vanished from the streets under the new order of things as had also passenger cars, taxis and trucks. Speed predominated. Noise had practically been

eliminated. Except for the gentle throb of giant motors far underground, the city was cloaked in silence.

At regular intervals along the four-speed moving bands that formed the transportation of the great metropolis, huge circular shafts of steel mounted upward beyond the roofs of the tallest buildings. Within these shafts, swift elevators carried passengers who lived in the outlying districts to the level of the station platforms of the interstate operating transport planes.

CLOSE to the entrance of one of the steel shafts stood a young man a little above medium height. His deep-sunken eyes were those of a dreamer, a searcher. They were the eyes of a man who had seen strange and startling things. At present they were staring into the pulsing wave of humanity flowing northward on the endless steel bands beyond the platform.

Quite suddenly they lighted with pleasure as a man and a girl detached themselves from the swift moving river of people and hurried to the spot where he stood.

"Think we were never coming?" Karl Danzig's eyes were much like those of Aaron Carruthers. Just now they sparkled with suppressed excitement.

Aaron Carruthers smiled in turn. "No, Karl. Any man but you. I couldn't imagine you being late." He turned his attention to the slim, dark haired girl. "Nanette," he murmured, extending his hand, "I didn't think you'd come."

Dazzling white teeth caught the glow of the blue-white incandescents along the platform, and became under the bow of her red lips a string of priceless pearls.

"I had to come, Aaron. Karl has done nothing but talk of your amazing discovery. The experiment fairly frightens me at times especially when I recall the sad fate of your friend, the missing Professor Dahlgren. I wish you boys would give up the idea—"

"Nan, be still," broke in Karl, with brotherly rudeness. Turning to Carruthers, "Everything all ready, Aaron?" he asked.

CARRUTHERS nodded. "As far as humanly possible. The element of error is always present. I've checked and re-checked my calculations. I've augmented the vacuum tubes by installing three super-dimensional inverse power tubes." He clasped the girl's arm. "The street is no place to talk. Let's go to the laboratory."

They crossed the moving bands by an overhead bridge and cut down a narrow canyon to the entrance of a crosstown series of bands. They stepped onto the first band. The speed was moderate. From there they moved over to the second. Carruthers was in a hurry. He guided the girl and her brother across the third to the fourth band of moving steel.

Buildings slid past them like wraiths in the electric light. They felt no winter chill, for the streets and platforms were heated by a constant flow of warm air from slots ingeniously arranged in the band of swift moving metal upon which they stood. Within a few minutes they had arrived at their destination. Quickly they reversed their path across the moving bands until they reached the disembarking platform. A short distance from the station they came to the entrance of a huge tower building.

Carruthers nodded to the doorman and they were admitted into a marble hallway. A silent, unattended lift bore them swiftly to the seventy-fifth floor. Down a deep carpeted hallway they moved. Carruthers touched his door. It opened. He stood to one side as the other two entered.

NANETTE cried with delight at the luxurious splendor of the place. "Why, Aaron, I never dreamed the night view could be quite so delightful! I do believe that if the hor-

rid government had not taken down that little Statue of Liberty and substituted the Shaft Triumph in its place, that I could easily see her fingers clasping the torch she was reputed to hold."

"Progress, dear girl," shrugged Carruthers, holding out his hands for her cape. "By the way, have you folks eaten?"

"Not in a week," said Karl.

"Von Sternberger's food tablets," informed the girl.

Carruthers nodded. His deep-set eyes regarded them appraisingly. "Any ill effects?"

"None whatever," spoke Danzig. "Neither of us have the slightest craving for food."

"Good. Did you bring any with you?"

"A whole carton."

"Then I guess we're already to make the experiment. You're sure, Nanette, that you're not afraid of. . . ."

"Don't be silly, Aaron. I haven't grown up with Karl for nothing. He's always used me for the disagreeable end of his crazy experiments. And besides," she smiled on both men, "I have a woman's curiosity for the unknown."

"Very well," said Carruthers gravely. From his waistcoat pocket he took a ring of keys and inserted one of them into the lock of an immense steel door. "Our laboratory," he announced, swinging the door wide.

NANETTE'S eyes opened wide at the paneled whiteness of the room. Most of the far side was taken up with electrical machines, dynamos, generators and glass enclosed motors of an advanced type. Overhead, concealed lights made the room as light as day. A heavy glass railing shielded a square spot in the exact center of the room.

"What's that for?" asked the girl.

Danzig and Carruthers both regarded it with troubled eyes. It was Carruthers who spoke.

"That railing marks the spot where Professor Dahlgren stood when the rays of our atomic machine struck him."

"You mean," breathed the girl, "that he never moved from that spot after the rays touched his body? What happened?"

Karl had already divested himself of his coat and was checking the copper cables leading into a strange machine.

"It was rather curious," remarked Carruthers. "The moment the ray touched him his body began to dwindle. But evidently he suffered no pain. As a matter of fact his mind remained quite clear."

"How did you know?"

"As he dwindled in size," continued Carruthers, "he shouted warningly that the rays had become confused and for us to cut the switch. But the warning came a fraction of a second too late. Even as my fingers opened the contact, his body dwindled to a mere speck and disappeared entirely from sight."

NANETTE gazed with staring eyes at the ill-fated spot. Her face had grown steadily paler. "Oh, Aaron. It's awful! What do you suppose happened?"

Carruthers' eyes glowed strangely. "I didn't exactly know at the time, Nanette. I'm not sure that I know even now. But I've got a theory and Karl has helped me to build a second machine to flash a restoring ray on the square spot. What will take place I cannot even conjecture."

"Let's get on with the experiment," interrupted Karl. "Nanette can be shown later what she is to do."

Carruthers turned to Danzig. "All right, Karl. Draw up a chair to your machine. And you, Nannette, sit close to this switch. It's off now. To turn it on, simply push it forward until the copper plates slide into each other. To turn the current off, you pull sharply out. However, we aren't quite ready."

He shifted his position until he stood

before a third machine slightly smaller than the other two. His fingers clicked a switch. The dial of the instrument glowed whitely.

"It's important," continued Carruthers, "that we first locate our interference. We have here, Nanette, a common television receiving apparatus capable of picking up news and pictures from any corner of the globe. Ready, Karl?"

Danzig clicked on the switch before his own machine and turned one of the many dials mounted on the panel in front of him. A faint hum filled the room as the generator settled to its task.

CARRUTHERS reached up and dimmed the overhead lights. A screen of what looked like frosted glass set in the wall glowed luminously. The interior of a famous broadcasting studio became mirrored in the glass screen. Into it stepped the master of ceremonies. He spoke briefly of the New Year's activities that would soon take place when the twenty-eighth day of Jupiter ended at midnight.

"Boston," said Carruthers. "Too near."

"Try 'Frisco," suggested Karl. "The tubes ought to be sufficiently heated by this time."

The dial whirled beneath Carruthers' slender fingers. The pictures framed in the frosted panel faded. Another took its place. San Francisco—an afternoon concert. Carruthers saw and listened for a moment, then moved thousands of miles out to sea.

Shanghai drifted into the panel, announcing in sing-song accents the weather reports. Following this came reports of various uprisings along the Manchurian border.

While yet the three listeners and watchers bent their heads toward the panel in the wall, a strange thing occurred. The silver frostiness of the screen became violently agitated with what looked like tiny sparks darting in and about each other like miniature solar systems. Shanghai faded from the picture. All that remained visible now was the jumbled mass of needle-pointed sparks of luminosity.

"Careful," warned Carruthers. "Slow up the speed of your reflector, Karl. There, that's better. Watch the meter reading. I'm going to step up the power of the dimensional tubes. Steady!"

FROM an invisible reproducer came a sharp, metallic crackling like machine-gun bullets rattling on a tin roof. The sparks on the screen became violently agitated, pushing around in erratic circles and elipses. They glowed constantly in shades of bright green through the blues into the deep violets of the color scale.

"What do you read?" asked Carruthers.

"Point seven six nine," answered Karl.

"Shift it back towards the blue, about two points lower on the scale."

Danzig twisted two dials at the same time with minute exactness. "Point seven six eleven," he intoned.

"Hold it," ordered Carruthers. "Blue should predominate." He turned his eyes on the dancing sparks on the screen. They glowed now a deep indigo blue. "Lock your dials against accidental turning. We're tuned to the vanishing point."

Danzig rose to his feet. "What will we use?"

Carruthers looked hastily around the room. "Most anything will do." His eyes rested on a glass test tube. Quickly he rose to his feet and removed it from the wall rack. Then bending over the glass railing that enclosed the mysterious square he placed it on the floor. He turned now to the girl.

"Quiet, now, Nanette, and don't under any condition leave the chair. The path of the ray should pass within two feet of you, leaving a wide margin of safety. All right, Karl. Set the dials of the inverse dimensional tubes at

point seven six eleven, and switch the power to the Roentgen tube."

Through the dimly lighted laboratory came a spurt of bluish flame that twisted and squirmed with slow undulations around the cathode electrode.

"Fine," enthused Carruthers. "The cathode emanations coincide exactly with the interference chart. Watch your meter gauges, Karl, while I switch to the atomic ray."

HIS fingers closed over a switch. The indigo points of flame bathing the electrode gathered themselves into a ring and began to revolve around an invisible nucleus located near the electrode. Carruthers studied the revolving flame for a moment, then switched off the television machine. It was no longer needed.

Carefully, for the atomic ray was still a mysterious force to Carruthers, he opened a small door in the panel and drew out the focusing machine. It was shaped very much like a camera except that the lens protruded several inches beyond the machine proper.

With infinite patience he made the final adjustments and moved away from the front of the lens. "Ready?"

Danzig nodded and threw on the full power of the inverse dimensional tubes. A low clear hum filled the quiet room of the laboratory. From the lens of the focusing machine shot a pale, amber beam. It struck the glass test tube squarely in the center and glowed against its smooth sides.

Carruthers reached across his own machine and turned the final switch. The amber beam emanating from the lens increased in intensity. And as it increased it took on a deep violet color.

Nanette cried out in muffled alarm. But even as Vincent raised his voice to quiet her fears the test tube suddenly shrunk to nothingness and vanished into the ether.

"Aaron!" whispered the girl, awesomely. "It . it's gone!"

Carruthers nodded. Beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead. Would the returning ray work? He had made the test tube follow the same route as that taken by Professor Dahlgren. Both were gone. He clicked off the switch and the beam faded.

WITH a deliberate calmness that in no way matched the inner tumult brought on by the experiment, he turned the dials of the machine he and Danzig had worked out together. A second switch clicked under his fingers. From the lense of the focusing machine shot the reverse atomic beam. As it struck the center of the square it turned a bright vermilion. For several seconds it played upon empty space, then the miracle unfolded before their eyes.

Something like a glass sliver reflected the beam. It grew and enlarged under their startled eyes until it had achieved its former size, then the power that had brought it back switched itself off automatically.

Together both men examined the test tube. It appeared in no way harmed, nor did it feel either warm or cold from its trip through the elements.

"It works!" marveled Danzig. "Let's try it again with something larger."

"I've got a better idea," said Carruthers, rising to his feet. He crossed the laboratory and went to another part of his rooms. Presently he returned, holding a small pink rat in his hands. The rodent was young, having been born only a week before. "Now we'll see what happens."

"Oh, it's torture to the poor thing," burst out Nanette.

"It won't hurt it," growled Karl. "Aaron knows what he's doing."

Carruthers placed the little rat in the center of the square. It lay there, very quiet and unblinking. Again the switches clicked as the contacts were closed.

Came once more the beam of amber colored light followed closely by the violet. The rat dwindled to the size of an insect, then disappeared into space. The three watchers held their breath.

Carruthers' hand trembled the least bit as he threw on the switch controlling the animal's return to the world.

A VERMILION shaft of light pierced the semi-darkened rooms. The animal had been gone from sight not more than a minute. Abruptly something grayish white unfolded in the reflector's beam. It rapidly expanded under three pairs of bulging eyes—not the small, pinkish rat that had disappeared but sixty seconds previous, but a full grown rat, scarred and tailless as if from innumerable battles with other rats.

As the current clicked off Aaron Carruthers bent forward. Too late. The rat scurried from the laboratory with a squeal of alarm. Carruthers returned to his seat before the atomic machine and sat down. His face was worried. Dark thoughts stormed his reason. The rat he had placed within the atomic ray had aged nearly two years during the minute it was out of mortal sight. Two years!

He pulled a pad from his pocket and calculated the time that had elapsed since Professor Dahlgren had vanished from that same spot. Nearly forty hours. That would mean. .

Nanette stirred in her chair. "What happened to the little rat, Aaron?"

Carruthers, busy making calculations, did not hear the question.

She turned to her brother. "Karl, what's the meaning of this? The second experiment didn't turn out like the first one. What became of that little rat?"

"I don't know what happened, Nan," spoke Karl. "Now don't bother me with your silly questions. You saw the same thing I did."

CARRUTHERS raised his head and spoke quietly. "That rat you saw materialize under the atomic rays was the same rat you saw me place within the square."

"But it couldn't be," protested the girl.

"Nevertheless," shrugged Carruthers. "It was the same animal—only it had aged nearly two years during the brief time interval it was off from our planet."

"It's preposterous," cried the girl.

"Nothing is preposterous nowdays, Nanette."

"That's the woman of it," spoke Karl. "Always doubting."

"You boys are playing tricks on me," retorted the girl sharply. "I shouldn't have come to your old laboratory. Just because I'm a girl. . ."

"Don't," pleaded Carruthers, looking up from his pad of figures. "We're trying to solve the mystery underlying the forces which we have created." He replaced the test tube within the center of the square and returned to the atomic machine.

Through the twilight shadows of the room glowed the strange new ray. Faintly the generator hummed. Lights sparkled and twisted around the cathode in serpentine swirls.

"You needn't trouble to explain your silly experiment again," finished Nanette, rising abruptly to her feet. "I'm gong home and dress for the New Year's party."

"Watch your switch like I asked you to," spoke Carruthers.

"Sit down," added Karl. "Don't put the rest of us in danger!"

"Oh-h-h!" gasped the girl as she inadvertently stepped squarely into the atomic ray of amber-colored light.

CARRUTHERS leaped impatiently to his feet. An inarticulate cry of horror froze upon his lips. Forgetful that he himself was directly in line of the atomic ray he lunged forward, his mind centering on a single act—to drag the protesting and now thoroughly frightened girl out of the path of the penetrating ray.

But even as he started forward Nanette tripped over the glass railing around the square. Carruthers moved quickly. Yet his movements were slow and ungainly as compared to the speed

of the light ray. He saw the figure of Nanette decrease in size before his eyes, heard the muffled expression of alarm and fear in Danzig's voice; then the room suddenly began to extend itself upward with the speed of a meteor.

What once had been walls and bare furniture resolved themselves into a range of hills, then mountains. The twilight gloom of the room became a dark void of empty space that seemed to rush past his ears like a moaning wind.

He had the sensation of falling through infinite space as if he had been propelled from the world and hurled out into the vastness of interplanetary space. Something brushed against him —something soft and fluttering. He grasped it like a drowning man would clutch a straw. "Nanette!"

The name echoed and re-echoed through his mind yet never seemed to get beyond his tightly clenched lips. He felt something cool close over his hand. Instinctively he grasped it. Her hand. Together they clung to each other as they felt themselves being hurled through endless space.

The twilight changed swiftly to black night that rushed past the two clinging figures and enveloped them in a wall of silence. Then out of the mysterious fastness came the dull glow of what looked like a distant planet. It grew and enlarged till it reached the size of a silver dollar. Little pinpoints of light soon began to appear on all sides of it, very much like stars.

CARRUTHERS attempted to reassure Nanette that all was well, and they were out on the streets of the great metropolis. But even as he wrenched his tightly locked lips apart he saw that the shining disc far out into space was not what he had first thought it was—the earth's moon.

He shook his head to clear it of the perplexing cobwebs. What was the matter with his mind? He couldn't think or reason. All he knew was that he had erred. This strange planet looming in the sky held nothing familiar in markings nor in respect to its relations to the stars beyond it.

While yet he groped in the darkness for something tangible, his mind reverted to the girl at his side. She was clinging to him like a frightened child. He could feel the pressure of her body against his and it thrilled him immeasurably. No longer was he the cold, calculating young man of science.

How long they remained in state of suspension while strange worlds and planets flashed into a new sky before their startled eyes, Aaron Carruthers didn't know. At times it seemed like hours, years, ages. And when he thought of the tender nearness of the girl he held so tightly within his arms, it seemed like a few minutes.

Gradually the sensation of speed and space falling began to wear off, as if they were nearing earth or some solid substance once more. The air about them grew heavier. Then all movement through space ceased.

Carruthers was surprised to find what felt like earth beneath his feet. For long minutes he stood there, unmoving, still holding possessively to the girl.

"Aaron!" The name came out of the void like a faint caress.

"Nanette."

Reassured of each other's presence they stood perfectly still, lost in the vast silence of their isolation.

PRESENTLY the girl spoke. "Oh, Aaron, I'm frightened!"

"There's nothing to be alarmed at, dearest." The endearing term came for the first time from the man's lips. As long as he had known Nanette Danzig, love had never been mentioned between them. If it had ever existed, the feeling had not been expressed.

"You shouldn't call me that, Aaron."

His voice sounded curiously far-off when he answered. "I couldn't help it, Nan. Our nearness, the strange darkness, and the fact that we are alone

together brought strange emotions to my heart. At this moment you are the dearest—"

Bump, thump! Bump, thump!

"What's that noise?" breathed Nanette.

Carruthers turned his head to listen. To his ears came the pound of some heavy object striking the ground at well-regulated intervals.

Nanette, who had started to free herself from Carruthers' violent embrace, suddenly ceased to struggle. "Oh, what is it? What is it?" she whispered fearfully.

Carruthers sniffed the night air. A musky odor assailed his nostrils, strange and unfamiliar. "It's beyond me, Nanette. Let's move away from this spot. Perhaps we can find shelter for the rest of the night."

But the Stygian blackness successfully hid any form of shelter. Tired from their search they sat down.

"We might build a fire," suggested Carruthers, "only there doesn't seem to be any wood around. Nothing but bare rock."

"Perhaps it's just as well," spoke the girl. "The flames might attract prowlers."

"Maybe you're right," agreed Carruthers.

A SILENCE fell between them. After a long time Nanette spoke.

"I don't suppose, Aaron, that anything I can do or say will help matters any. I know that our being where we are is my own fault. I'm sorry. Truly I am."

"The harm is done," said Carruthers. "Don't say anything more about it."

Nanette pointed at the disc of light shining high in the heavens. "These stars are as strange to me, Aaron, as if I had never seen them before. Saturn is the evening star at this time of year. It isn't visible. Even the familiar craters and mountains of the moon look different. And it glows strangely."

"I'd rather not talk about it, Nan."

Nanette placed a hand upon his arm. "I'm not a child, Aaron. I'm a grown woman. Fear comes through not knowing. Tell me the truth."

"Let's sit down."

They sat upon the ground and both stared out at the night heavens that arched into infinity above them. Presently Carruthers took the girl's hand from his arm and held it gently between his own. "You've guessed rightly, Nan. The orb shining upon us is not our moon. I'll try and make it clear."

THE girl smiled reassuringly in the darkness. "I'm waiting."

"Strange as it must seem," began Carruthers, "you and I are still within the room of my laboratory. But we might as well be a million miles away for all the good it does us. Karl sits in his chair in the same position as when we disappeared in the violet glow of the atomic ray. His eyes are bulging with fear and horror. For days and days he'll continue to sit on that chair, his mind not yet attuned to what actually took place. What has happened? He doesn't know yet, Nan."

"Oh, it's incredible," sobbed Nanette.

"I know, but it's so obviously true that I won't even trouble to check my calculations." He pointed at the silver disc hanging low in the strange sky. "That, Nan, is not our moon. It is nothing more than a planetary electron very much like the one we are on at the present moment. The firmament is filled with them. From where we sit we can see but the half nearest to us. The glowing portion is illuminated from distant light rays shot off from the nucleus of the atom itself. That atom is going to be our light and heat for weeks, months, perhaps years to come. We're prisoners on an electron, and as such we are destined to rush through infinite space for the remainder of our lives unless. . . ."

"Unless what?"

Aaron Carruthers hesitated for a bare fraction of a second. "Karl!" he whis-

pered. "Our lives depend on him. Time flies fast for us, Nan. Already it is growing light. But not on our earth. Karl still sits upon his chair staring incredulously at the miracle of our disappearing bodies. It will take weeks of time, as it affects us, for the initial shock to travel along his nerves to the center of his brain."

HIS voice shook with emotion quite contrary to his usual calm nature. "Oh, I know it's hard to understand, Nan. I was a fool to meddle with laws of which I know so little compared to what there is yet to know."

"Then it's all true, Aaron. The little rat that came out from under the ray as an old rat was one and the same animal."

Carruthers nodded. "Time has changed in proportion to our size. We're moving so much faster than the earth that we must of necessity be bound to the universe of which we are now an integral part."

For a long time they remained silent, each immersed in dark, troubled thoughts. Nanette broke the silence.

"You don't suppose, Aaron, by any chance that Professor Dahlgren is still alive and on our planet?"

Carruthers shook his head negatively. "It's beyond human reason, Nan. He was lost in the ray for over forty hours. Translated into minutes he's been gone twenty-four hundred minutes. Since the mouse we placed within the light ray aged approximately two years in the space of one minute, Professor Dahlgren would, if he were alive, be about four thousand, eight hundred years old."

Nanette rose abruptly to her feet. "Oh bother the figures. My head's swimming with them. It's getting light now, and I'm hungry."

"Eat one of your food tablets," suggested Carruthers.

"Please don't get funny," said Nanette. "Karl has them in his coat pocket."

"Hum-m-m!" coughed Carruthers, following her example by rising to his feet. "Looks as though we'd have to rustle our food. I've got nothing on my person but a knife, a pencil, a fountain pen and some pieces of paper. Nothing very promising in any of them."

AT that moment the sky became fused with reddish light. Over the horizon appeared a shining orb. Far away hills and valleys leaped into sight. Then for the first time Carruthers noted the high plateau upon which he had spent the night. Had they ventured a hundred yards farther during the night they would have plunged into the rocky floor of a canyon a thousand feet below.

"Let's see if we can find a way down to the valley," he suggested. "If we get anything to eat it will have to come from trees. This plateau is barren of any form of vegetable matter."

They found a winding descent leading downward. It looked like a path that had been worn by the passage of many feet.

"Someone's been here before us," he exclaimed. "The ground is too well worn to be accidental."

"Look! Look!" pointed Nanette. Her face had become pale from the excitement of her discovery. "What is it, Aaron?"

Carruthers bent forward to examine the strange footprint. It was nearly two feet across and divided in the center, as if the animal that made it had but two toes.

"From the size of the tracks and the length of the animal's stride, I should say it was some form of an amphibious dinosaur long extinct in our own world."

"Are they dangerous?"

"It all depends upon the species. Some of them are pure vegetarians; others are carnivorous. The heavy tramping we heard during the night evidently came from the beast who left these footprints."

THEY had come upon the footprints where the path made a turn, leading into a dense growth of trees and underbrush. And as Carruthers knelt beside the path he heard a rustle as of something moving directly behind him. Wonderingly, he turned his head to trace the disturbance. But the woods seemed empty. "Strange," he murmured. "Did you hear something moving in back of us, Nan?"

Nan shook her head. "You don't think we're in any danger from these beasts, do you?"

Carruthers said nothing for the moment. Instead, he looked sharply in all directions and saw—nothing. "Let's push on till we come to some kind of a shelter. Perhaps we'll find people much like ourselves."

Down the path they hurried, glancing curiously right and left at unknown flowers and trees. A bird with brilliant feathers skimmed above their heads, uttering shrill cries. Other voices from the birds and animals in the woods took up the cry. The woods grew denser as they pushed into the unknown.

In the woods at their right a rodent squeaked as some larger animal pounced upon it. Presently they came to a pool of water roughly seventy feet across. While they knelt to quench their thirst they saw two young deer eyeing them from the far side. Soft feet pattered behind the kneeling couple. Carruthers half whirled as he rose to his feet and peered into the jungle behind him.

A blur of reddish brown vanished behind a tree. Man or animal Carruthers couldn't determine. He grasped Nanette by the arm and pulled her back to the path.

"Quick!" he whispered. "There's someone or something following us. I'm sure of it now."

NANETTE'S voice trembled slightly. "What is it, Aaron?"

"I don't know." He turned his head again. This time he saw the thing that was following. A low ejaculation of alarm escaped his lips. A gigantic ape! The mouth of the creature sagged grotesquely, revealing two rows of yellow fangs. And its orange colored eyes were burning coals set close together. Carruthers sucked in a deep breath.

"Run, Nan," he gritted. "I'll try and scare him away."

Simultaneously with the scream of fright from the startled girl, a huge mountain of grayish flesh and bones blocked the downward slope of the path. Carruthers paled as he turned and faced the new menace.

Coming directly toward them he saw an immense animal so great in size that it seemed to shut out the light. A prehistoric dinosaur! It came slowly and leisurely, swinging its great red mouth from side to side. Other denizens in the woods, sensing the presence of the huge killer, fled in a panic of alarm. Their shrill cries increased the terror that froze the hearts of the two earth people.

Nanette clung to her companion in abject terror, unable to move. Her fear stricken eyes were wild and staring as the mountain of flesh pushed towards them.

The animal's long neck arched far in front of its body, and its long, pointed tail remained out of sight within the trees.

Carruthers backed off the path into the underbrush, dragging the girl after him. The jaws of the huge animal opened wide with anticipation. Lumberingly he turned from the path and followed. Trees crashed before its gigantic bulk. The woods became a bedlam of snapping branches.

The horrified scream of the girl ended in a gurgling sigh. She toppled to the ground in a dead faint. Carruthers flung himself beside her crumpled body and gathered it into his arms. A quick glance he threw at the spot where he had last seen the gigantic ape. The animal was no longer there. It had disappeared.

THE man's lips became a hard, straight line. Even as he straightened to his feet the leaves and branches of an overturned tree whipped his face. The red-mouthed dinosaur was perilously near. So close that Carruthers could smell its great, glistening body. The odor was musky and foul.

Stumbling blindly he attempted to widen the distance between himself and his pursuer. But the hungry dinosaur pounded steadily on its course. There was no getting away from it. Its beady eyes sought out its prey and its keen smell told it exactly where the earth beings were.

On and on staggered Carruthers. The extra burden of the girl hampered his movements. Unseen roots tripped him time and time again. Each time he scrambled to his feet and picked up the unconscious girl. Briars tore at his clothing and stung his hands.

The underbrush was thickening. A warm, dank smell clung to the vegetation now almost tropical in nature. Beads of sweat rolled down the man's forehead and into his eyes. But the horrible fear of those red, dripping jaws spurred him to renewed efforts.

He doubled to the left, hoping to throw the animal off his tracks. The undergrowth seemed to thin out at this point. Renewed hope flowed through the young scientist's blood. He stumbled on blindly, scarce watching where his feet were taking him. A sigh of relief came to his lips. Ahead of him he saw a clearing. His stride lengthened and he broke into a shambling run.

THEN it was he saw towering walls rising up on both sides of him—steep walls that he could never scale, even if alone. He tried to change his course, but the huge bulk of the pursuing dinosaur effectively blocked his path. There was no alternative but to push on and pray for an opening in the rugged cliffs.

Abruptly a sigh of despair escaped his lips. The walls of the canyon narrowed suddenly, and across it stretched a wall of bare rock. He realized too late that he had returned to the base of the plateau where he had spent the night. The grim, towering walls hemmed him in completely from three sides. At the fourth side bulked the dinosaur, coming slowly, ponderously.

Beady eyes peered down cunningly at the helpless man and woman. Confident now that its prey couldn't escape, it extended its huge bulk across the narrow canyon for a leisurely killing.

Carruthers glared at the monster with fear-distended eyes. In his heart he realized that there was no escape. He had no means of defense, no way to combat the huge monster but flight. And even that was now denied him.

Closer and closer inched the killer until its great, red mouth appeared like the fire box of a huge boiler. Hot breath fanned the man's cheek. The nauseous odor of the beast made his stomach wrench. He dropped to his knees close to the inert figure of the girl and glared vengefully into the beady eyes.

The gaping mouth at the end of a long, supple neck jerked forward. Carruthers dragged the girl away just in time to escape the gnashing teeth. The dinosaur stamped angrily.

Once again Carruthers felt its hot breath beating upon his face. He cringed at the thought of this kind of death. No one would ever know how it happened. Not even his closest friend, Karl Danzig! What a mess things were. Why didn't the red mouth of the mighty dinosaur close over him and crush out life? Why must he kneel in torture?

From near at hand a piercing scream rang through the air. A harsh scream. A terrifying scream!

CARRUTHERS raised his head. The dinosaur had twisted around to glare hatefully at the disturber of its meal. Other screams splintered the

forest air. And as the kneeling man watched he saw the great red ape who had been dodging his footsteps a short time before, slouch between the dinosaur's hulking body and the wall of the cliff. Behind it came others—black mammals with curving arms that dragged along the ground.

Their fangs were bared. They were in an ugly mood. Arriving in front of the dinosaur and less than four feet from the earth man and woman, the leader silenced its followers with a low growl and turned in concentrated fury upon the dinosaur. Its long arms drummed a throbbing tattoo upon its hairy chest.

The dinosaur bellowed protestingly against the attitude of the apes and gorillas. The ape leader protested with equal violence. The dinosaur shifted uneasily, wagging its heavy head from side to side. On all sides came deep growls from the mammals.

Carruthers watched all this display torn between doubt and fear. Which side would win? How could the apes and gorillas, huge as they were, hope to force the dinosaur away? But the apes were masters. This much was apparent. Inch by inch the dinosaur backed away, glaring vengefully. And having reached a spot where it could turn around it did so. Presently the ground trembled as it made off through the steaming jungle. The leader of the mammals turned and faced the earth people. Long, searching minutes passed. Its close set eyes seemed to be studying them.

NANETTE stirred and opened her eyes. The sight of the anthropoids caused her to recoil.

"Steady, Nan," spoke Carruthers softly.

Other apes and gorillas gathered around the giant red animal. They displayed no hostility, only an intense interest. One by one they squatted before the earth people until they formed a half circle, reaching from the one wall of the rocky plateau to the other.

While they sat there it began to grow dark. Carruthers removed his watch and ventured a glance at it. Daylight had lasted less then three hours. An hour for twilight, then it would be dark. Evidently the cycle around the nucleus of the atom took approximately ten hours.

Nanette sat up. "Aaron!"

He answered without removing his eyes from the red ape less then four feet away. "Don't look at me, Nan. Concentrate on the big, red fellow. He's evidently in control. If we act the least bit frightened they might decide to destroy us."

"What are they waiting for? Why don't they go away?"

"We'll know before long. I imagine they're trying to figure out who we are and what we are doing on their tiny planet."

Darkness descended rapidly. Overhead, a small moon rose majestically in the heavens and started its journey through the night. Its faint light revealed the fact that the apes showed no intentions of leaving. They still squatted before the earth people, in a half circle of staring brown eyes.

Whatever fear Carruthers had felt towards the animals died away. "They're harmless," he told Nanette. "Get some sleep if you can."

LONG after the tired girl had drifted into slumber Carruthers sat with his back against the wall, mentally trying to figure the whole thing out. The dinosaur was real enough. Yet the apemen had frightened it away, in fact had compelled it to go without actually engaging in combat. No question about it. The anthropoids were in control. But who controlled them?

Quite suddenly his eyes snapped open. Daylight had come again. He must have fallen asleep. The shrill chatter of the apemen came to his ears. The red ape leader shuffled to his feet and looked from the earth people to the spot in the jungle whence came the

chatter. Abruptly he opened his mouth and emitted a flood of gibberish sounds.

The gorillas and apes at his side flattened their bodies against the rocky walls in attitudes of expectant waiting.

"What's happening?" gasped the girl.

"There's no telling," whispered Aaron. "It must be someone or something of importance. Note the expressions of awe and reverence on the faces of the apemen. My God, Nanette, look!"

Out of the depths of the jungle emerged seven white beings—human or animal it was impossible to tell. They were huge creatures with the bodies of men. Erect of carriage, almost human in looks, they contrasted strangely with the red apes and the black gorillas. Six of them appeared to act as bodyguard for the seventh.

As they reached the space in front of the two earth people, the bodyguard stepped aside. The seventh white one came to a dead stop. Long and intently he stared at the man and girl crouched against the wall. And the scrutiny seemed to please him, for he smiled.

Carruthers eyed the figure uneasily. He saw what seemed to be a man dressed in a long, fibrous garment. With white hair and beard, it was a strange figure indeed for an apeman. He saw also that the eyes were well spaced, a mark of intelligence. The forehead was high and broad. And as Carruthers mentally studied the creature, strange and bizarre thoughts crossed his mind.

THE mouth of the white apeman twitched as if he were going to speak. The heavy lips parted. A single word came to Carruthers' ear—"Man?"

Carruthers nodded. "We are from the earth."

The lips of the apeman moved painfully as if speech came with the utmost of difficulty. "The prophecy of the Great One has been fulfilled even as it has been written."

The red apes and black gorillas allowed their eyes to wander from their white leader to the two earth people. And their faces reflected the supernatural awe with which they regarded the earth people.

"It's uncanny that an animal can speak our language," breathed Nanette.

As if he hadn't heard her, Carruthers spoke again. "We are from the earth," he repeated. "We have been on your world many hours, and we are both hungry and thirsty."

"Words come hard," came from the lips of the white bearded one. "I have not used them for years."

"And who are you?" asked Carruthers.

The white bearded one paused as if to recall some distant echo from the past. "I am the last of the tribe of Esau. But come! This is no place for speech. Long have I and my followers waited for this hour."

WITHOUT another word he swung around. The six guards enclosed his aged body in a hollow square and the procession moved away. They came after a short journey to a natural opening leading to the heart of the plateau. The apes and gorillas, with the exception of the red leader, remained outside. The remainder of the party pushed through a tortuous tunnel until they reached a cavernous opening directly beneath the plateau. Vertical openings in the walls furnished light and air. The white chieftain spoke in a strange tongue to his followers, and they instantly prepared three couches in a far corner of the cavern.

As the earth people seated themselves on the skins that made up the couch they were both conscious of a far-away rumbling like peals of thunder. Not having seen any signs of a storm outside Carruthers turned inquiringly on the aged chieftain.

The old man's eyes were shadowed with grim foreboding. "I have ordered something to refresh you and your companion," he said. "Eat first, my friends. We will talk later."

The six body-guards left the main cavern. Presently they returned with large trays made of fanlike leaves resembling the palmetto. Fresh fruits and uncooked vegetables formed the bulk of the meal. In silence they ate. After the litter had been cleared away the guards withdrew with the exception of the giant red ape, who crouched near the opening to the tunnel.

"I am glad you have come," began the old chieftain, "but sorry, too. Our planet, or rather the higher forms of life upon it, are doomed."

AGAIN there came to the ears of the earth people that far-off beat of sound that seemed to shake the ground. They looked to the white bearded leader for explanation.

"Ah, you hear it too," murmured the other. "For centuries, we of the great tribe of Esau have fought for the supremacy of our little world—ever since the Great One appeared in our midst and instructed us in world knowledge."

"And this Great One, as you call him," spoke Carruthers. "Who was he?"

"He was from your world. I never saw him. He comes to me as a legend. For years he toiled among us, teaching and instructing until we mastered his language. He called himself Dahlgren. Later he ruled all the tribes. We of the Esau line he made into leaders because of our higher intelligence. The tribes of Zaku were trained for war. Perhaps you have noticed the chief of all the Zakus. He is crouching now beside the entrance to our inner walls. He is Marbo, and his followers live in the jungles."

"And does he talk as you do?"

The white chieftain shook his head. "No. Only we of the Esau tribe have mastered speech. Not counting the women of our tribe that comprise our numbers we are only seven in all."

"I owe Marbo my life as does also my companion," said Carruthers.

"Marbo looks upon you earth people as gods," spoke the old chieftain. "He and his followers will protect you with their lives."

"And who rules over and beyond?" questioned Carruthers, waving his arm to cover the remaining portion of the electron.

"There is no rule beyond except that of force. The Great One called them by name, Morosaurus, Diplodocus, the Horned Ceratosaurus, and many others whose names I have long forgotten. They are our enemies whom we cannot destroy. And their numbers increase from year to year and are slowly backing us upon our last stronghold."

"Isn't there anything we can do?" asked Carruthers, feeling a quiver of apprehension along his spine.

SLOWLY the old chieftain shook his head. "Nothing whatever. Marbo and his followers can control one or two, but when the herds begin to push on into our territory, we are doomed. Even now their rumblings and bellowings come through the jungles. Their thirst and hunger for flesh is enormous."

Carruthers turned upon the girl. "The old chief's words explain everything, Nan. Professor Dahlgren has been here and gone. He lived a lifetime in the span of a few hours earth-time. Now it looks as if we were destined to follow in his footsteps."

"I'm not afraid," said the girl. "Nothing can be worse than what we have already passed through." And her eyes softened as she placed her small hands within those of Carruthers. "We have each other, Aaron."

He smiled reassuringly and turned to the old chieftain. "I am Carruthers, a friend and assistant to Dahlgren. The girl here is Nanette."

The chieftain smiled gravely. "And I am Zark. Welcome to my kingdom, Carruthers and Nanette. We need you here. Now tell me of your world, for long have I waited for a follower of the great Dahlgren to appear before my people."

Throughout the remainder of the day Carruthers talked. The shafts of light paled at the end of the short day. Night came, bringing with it a sense of security against the increasing hordes that thundered and trumpeted beyond the borders of the jungle.

In the morning Zark instructed Marbo to remain close to Carruthers at all times. So the young scientist left the cavern and ascended the path leading to the top of the plateau. He looked at his watch and compared the second hand with the nucleus atom sailing across the heavens to estimate its speed.

DAYS passed as he made his observations. Meanwhile he had searched and found the exact spot wherein he and Nanette had first stepped foot onto the electron. This spot he carefully marked off with a ring of huge boulders carried up by the followers of Marbo. Then he began to calculate upon his pad. There must be no mistakes. He and Nanette must be within the magic circle at the estimated time.

Between times he helped Nanette construct their living quarters in the cavern. Zark had furnished them with skins and furs with which to cover the walls. Carruthers made a fireplace of stones and restored the lost art of fire to Zark, Marbo and their followers.

Days slipped by like minutes. Short days filled with excursions into the jungles. Carruthers' face soon bristled with a stubble of beard. This lengthened with time. Sharp thorns tore their clothes to ribbons. Nanette, womanlike, cried many times during the nights because of the lack of a mirror and a comb for her untidy hair.

But other and more important events soon claimed the attention of the earth people. Day by day the herds of dinosaurs and other monsters of like breed edged closer and closer to the tiny civilization around the plateau. It worried Carruthers so much that he sought out Zark and had him bring the other six members of his tribe together for a council of war.

"A complete defensive system, Zark," he told them. "We must make a fortress of the plateau and fill the caverns with food."

ZARK shook his head. "No. It is quite useless. Followers of Marbo have recently returned from over the beyond and report strange things. I have hesitated to speak of them for fear of alarming you. Our planet is breaking up. Violent eruptions have caused fires of stone and mud. The rumblings you have heard were not made entirely by our enemies. They came from the ground.

"An earthquake," murmured Carruthers, momentarily stunned by the news. "But they are always of short duration, Zark. We have them on our own planet."

"Ah, but these are different. They cover the whole of our globe. The great Dahlgren noted them while he was with us. He wrote many words and figures on paper concerning them. Only yesterday I unearthed these records. The life of our planet was doomed to destruction during the present year. What matter if the herds of dinosaurs overrun us and destroy lives? In the end they, too, will be destroyed. It is fate. We can do nothing."

Even as the old chieftain spoke a gigantic rumbling, greater in intensity than any heretofore, shook the electron. Above the deep rolling disturbance underground rose the shrill cries of the apemen.

Carruthers leaped to his feet and raced through the tunnel. A herd of dinosaurs choked the path leading to the outside entrance. Marbo brushed

past him, shrilling in great excitement.

"Drive them away!" ordered Carruthers. "Like this!" He hurled a rock at the eye of the nearest animal.

The dinosaur bellowed and backed away. The apes and gorillas, used to fighting only with their long arms, caught on to the stunt with surprising quickness. Their powerful arms reached out. Stones and boulders began to hurtle from the mouth of the tunnel. They thudded against the heads of the great monsters like hailstones.

Subdued and frightened by this sudden display of force, the monsters withdrew down the path. But the apemen had discovered a new method of warfare. They found a childish delight in hurling ston Within a few minutes the slope was barren of rocks. The animals followed up their momentary advantage and ran screaming down the path. The dinosaurs fled in panic.

AS soon as the enemy had been driven away, Carruthers pointed out to Marbo the advantage of gathering the stones up from the ground and returning them to the space around the mouth of the tunnel so that he and his followers would be ready for a second repulse.

Zark appeared at this moment and helped with the explanation. His crafty old eyes turned with new respect upon the earthman.

Carruthers toiled with them every day from then on, building and fortifying the plateau against further incursions of the monsters. Security and peace reigned for several weeks, then hostilities broke out afresh.

The rumblings of the electron had increased with each passing week. Volcanic eruptions poured fresh discharges of molten lava and fiery sparks along the edges of the jungles.

"I don't want to needlessly alarm you, Nan," he told her that night, "but the fires have started. Zark was right. Unless we have rain before to-morrow morning the heat and smoke will drive us out into the open."

"But we can go to the top of the plateau," suggested the girl. "There aren't any trees—"

A concentrated bellowing cut off the rest of her words. Driven towards higher ground by the heat of the flames the dinosaurs were trampling up the path leading to the tunnel.

Once again Carruthers rallied his army of apemen around him and attempted to drive the mammals away. As they reached the end of the tunnel a cloud of dense smoke stung their eyes. The apemen shrilled in a sudden panic and forgot all their previous training in driving off the dinosaurs. Like scurrying rats they scattered.

FLAMES from the conflagration broke through the smoke—flames that leaped and twisted skyward.

Carruthers flung off the fear that held him spellbound and started along up the path leading to the top of the plateau. A disheveled figure appeared suddenly at his side—Nanette!

"Come," he whispered, hoarsely. "We've got to get out of this or we'll choke to death."

"But Zark," breathed the girl. "He and his followers are still in the cavern. We can't leave them."

Like one demented of reason, Carruthers raced back along the tunnel to the cavern. "Zark!" he shouted.

The sound of his voice was drowned in the welter of screaming bedlam coming up from below as the dinosaurs and apes fought for the supremacy of life. But of Zark and his six followers he found absolutely no sign. Quickly he hurried back to where he had left Nanette.

Even as he reached the spot he had a sudden premonition of danger. A gorilla, huge and black, brushed past him on the path, carrying a limp burden under his shaggy arm.

"Stop!" commanded Carruthers, hurrying after the animal.

A huge arm knocked him sprawling.

Spitting blood Carruthers staggered to his feet. Up to this time he had felt no fear of the gorillas. They had been orderly and well behaved. Fearful that harm would come to the girl he ran after the dark figure ahead. The red glow of flames swept nearer. The gorilla came to a stop and faced its pursuer. Lust shone from its close set eyes—lust and passion.

Carruthers stopped dead in his tracks. "Drop her!" he demanded.

The animal snarled hoarsely. There came the sound of ripping cloth. Nanette screamed—a terrifying scream that echoed and re-echoed through the electron night.

IT was then that the thin cloak of civilization dropped from Aaron Carruthers' back. He became in a single moment an animal fighting for his mate. With a snarl equally vicious as that of the gorilla pawing at the helpless girl, he lunged forward.

Mouthing his rage, the gorilla flung the earth man to the ground. Carruthers came up frothing at the mouth. With grim intensity he fastened himself to the animal's free arm. The raging mammal staggered helplessly under the extra burden and dropped the girl to concentrate his fury on the man. It raised a hairy arm aloft for the smashing blow. Instinctively Carruthers released his hold.

At that very moment the electron lurched sickeningly, causing them both to lose their footing. The violent upheaval sent Carruthers one way and the gorilla the other. While the man stumbled to his feet to resume battle he saw the infuriated monster stagger over the edge of the plateau wall into a sheer drop of a thousand feet.

Starkly through the night came the growling roars of the giant beasts from the jungles below. Nanette fluttered to his side. Her dress was torn and dragged on the ground. For all her disheveled appearance she was still beautiful to look upon. Forgetful of the danger on all sides of him, the animal in Carruthers saw in her pitifully half-clad body the same thing that the beast had desired. His head whirled hotly.

"Aaron!" she pleaded as his arm reached out to clutch her.

Hungrily he drew her to him. The pale light of the electron moon mingled with the roaring blast of the flames. Madness inflamed his heart and pounded his blood.

"Don't, Aaron," protested the girl, trying to free herself.

SOMETHING in the quality of the girl's frightened tones brought the man back to normal. He fought against the overwhelming desire to possess with all the force of his nature. And the better half triumphed. No longer was he an animal, but a reasoning human being. With a faint sigh he released her and wiped a hand across his dripping forehead.

"I'm sorry, Nan," he murmured. "That great brute drove me mad for an instant. I'm all right now."

Together they stood in the electron night and watched death creep closer and closer. The plateau was entirely surrounded with flames now and the heat was increasing with each passing moment. As it increased they backed towards the center.

From under their feet came the choking cries of the apemen. They had returned to the cavern only to be overcome by smoke fumes. While yet the earth people stood there waiting and watching the red death creep nearer, the path leading downward into the jungle became a mass of moving shadows.

"The dinosaurs!" cried Nanette. "Oh, Aaron! We are lost!"

"Steady, girl," soothed the man. "If we stand still they might not see us in the dark. The smoke will destroy our scent."

But as the minutes passed the herd of monsters increased. They crowded along the path and spread out over the top of the plateau. Once again the

smell of their glistening bodies fouled the nostrils of the earth people.

Slowly Carruthers guided Nanette back towards the ring of rocks—perhaps the barrier would serve to keep the animals away. He scrambled across one of the boulders and pulled the girl after him. As he did so, a violent subterranean action shook the electron from one end to the other.

CARRUTHERS braced his feet against the ring of rocks to keep from pitching headlong to the ground. Nanette clung to him wordlessly. All around them the giant forces of nature raged sullenly. Twisting seams appeared in the rocky floor of the plateau from which oozed gaseous vapors.

"Courage," soothed Carruthers as he held the quivering body of the frightened girl close to his own. "This can't last."

But the ground continued to lurch and heave on its axis. Vivid lights crossed and criss-crossed the atomic heavens. The fissures in the ground appeared now as black canals. The lower part of the circle of boulders disappeared. Off to the right came despairing screams. White bodies glowed for an instant against the background of flames.

"Zark!" shouted Carruthers, as he saw the leader of the tribe of Esau and his followers making their way along the plateau top.

Zark must have heard the earthman's voice, for he started forward at a run. Simultaneously there appeared a herd of the greatest of all the prehistoric monsters—the Brontosaurus. They bulked enormously against the flame-licked skies. Zark and his followers attempted to avoid them. But fear of the scorching flames drove the monsters forward. There followed a maddening moment of unutterable pain for the remaining ones of the tribe of Esau, then the herd trampled them underfoot and rumbled towards the half circle of rocks where the two earth people were crouched.

The leader of the Brontosaurus herd trumpeted madly and barged for the higher ground of safety. Too late did instinct warn it of the widening fissure underfoot. Before it could stop the pressure of the herd drove it into the crevice.

CARUTHERS drew back to the extreme inside edge of the boulders trying to still his ears against their insane bellowings. A cloud of heavy, choking smoke enveloped him for a moment then passed away. Then it was that he saw a new star in the atomic heavens,—a star that seemed to burn with the brilliance of a meteor. Even as he watched he was conscious of it drawing closer.

The planet was now in a continuous uproar. The ground was heaving and trembling as if from some inward strain. This was the end. Carruthers realized it with a sinking heart. In another minute the electron would disintregate into a flaming mass of matter and fling itself from its orbit around the atom.

And then the light from the approaching star struck them in a blinding radiance of vermilion flames. Carruthers held his breath. Some invisible force seemed to take possession of his body and that of the girl at his side. The rocky plateau, now a boiling mass of rocks, dropped from under their feet. Clear, cold air enveloped their bodies. Then with the speed of light their bodies were hurled through planetary space, up, up, up into the vast reaches of the higher ether.

Darkness assailed them. The flames from the jungle fire vanished into nothingness. The electron moon paled to the size of a pin point, then went out.

Carruthers had the feeling of expansion and growth. It was as if his body was taking on the size of the whole world. It seemed to last for hours, days, ages. But all the while he clung fast to the slender, quivering body of Nanette.

MOUNTAINS and hills suddenly blazed before his eyes. Straight up and down mountains. He tried to stir his sluggish mind into action. What did they mean? Where had he seen them before? And while yet his mind struggled with the problem the mountains dwindled like melting snow. The pressure around his body relaxed. A blinding glare of steady light played upon his face. Then all was quietness and peace.

"Nan! Aaron!" The voice was Karl's.

Dazedly they looked around. What had once been mountains were now desks and chairs. They were back again in the laboratory. Several agonizing minutes passed before either could grasp the startling change in things. The horror of the electronic disaster still filled their minds to overflowing.

Carruthers recovered first. He stepped from the railed inclosure marking the spot where the atomic beam had restored them after their space flight, and guided the girl to a chair. Karl's face was drawn and white as his eyes rested on the two pitiful figures that had materialized out of the ether.

"Don't ask us any questions yet," spoke Carruthers in a tired voice. "We've passed through too many horrors. What was the matter, Karl? Couldn't you get the rays to work sooner?"

"Sooner?" Danzig's eyes were wide with wonder. He glanced at his watch. "It was a little difficult to control both machines all alone, but I switched off the ray from the inverse dimensional tubes and turned on the other immediately. All in all it must have taken me fifteen seconds."

"Fifteen seconds," repeated Carruthers, dazedly. "It's unbelievable." He dropped wearily into a chair and rested his forehead in the palms of his hands. "How long have we been gone, Nan?"

NANETTE pulled the ragged remnants of a dress around her knees and attempted a smile. "Almost four months, according to the passage of time on the electron."

"Impossible!" whispered Danzig, shutting his eyes to the truth.

Aaron Carruthers pointed to his clothes, now ragged and torn. "Look, Karl! Everything I have on is worn out completely. Observe my hair and beard, and the soles of my shoes. Human reason to the contrary, Nanette and I have lived like two animals for four months, and all in the space of fifteen seconds earth time. How can you account for it? We figured it out on paper. And we've proved it with our bodies. What it will mean to future civilization I can't foretell. It's beyond imagination."

And the laboratory became silent as a tomb as the three people tried with all the strength of their minds to grasp the miracle of the strange and unfathomable atomic rays.

PRODUCING HEAT BY ARCTIC COLD

PRODUCING heat by means of Arctic cold is a fantastic but none the less quite practicable idea evolved by Dr. H. Barjou of the French Academy of Science. Dr. Barjou says the water under the ice in the Arctic region is about 70 degrees Fahrenheit. While the air is many degrees less, there may be even a difference of 80 degrees. The unfrozen water could be pumped into a tank and permitted to freeze, thus generating heat, as freezing a cubic meter of ice liberates about as much heat as burning twenty-two pounds of coal. The heat produced would vaporize a volatile hydrocarbon which would drive a turbine. For condensing the hydrocarbon again, Dr. Barjou says great blocks of brine could be used.

Not only would the Arctic regions become comfortably habitable by means of this utilization of energy, contends Dr. Barjou, but heat also could be furnished for the rest of the world.

Now if some one only can discover how to make the Sahara Desert send forth cooling waves, the world will be perfect, temperaturally.

We were invisible!

Jetta of the Lowlands

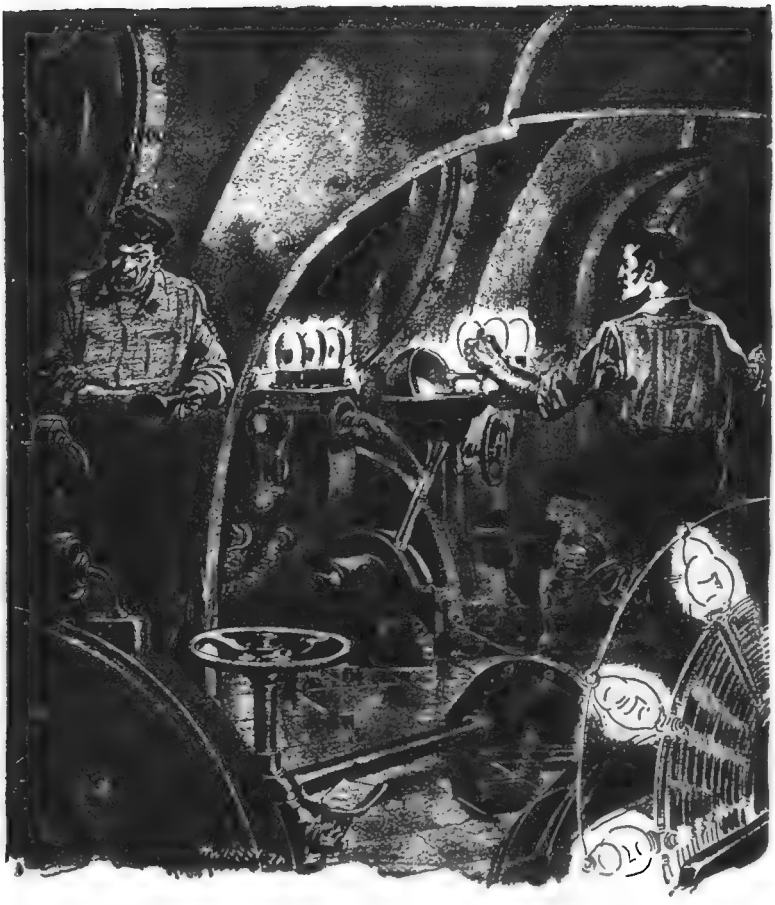
PART TWO OF A THREE-PART NOVEL

By Ray Cummings

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

IN the year 2020 the oceans have long since drained from the surface of the earth, leaving bared to sun and wind the one-time sea floor. Much of it is flat, caked ooze, cracked and hardened, with, here and there, small scum-covered lakes, bordered by slimy rocks. It is hot, down in the depth of the great Lowland areas, and it is chiefly adventurers and outcasts of human kind who can en-

Into remote Lowlands, in an invisible flyer, go Grant and Jetta—prisoners of a scientific depth bandit.



dure life in what few towns there are.

Into Nareda, the capital village of the tiny Lowland Republic of Nareda, goes Philip Grant, an operative of the United States Customs Department, on a dangerous assignment—to ferret out the men who are smuggling mercury into the United States from that place.

Grant falls in love with Jetta, the daughter of Jacob Spawn, a big mercury mine owner of Nareda, only to learn that Spawn has promised her in marriage to Greko Perona, the country's Minister of Internal Affairs.

Grant follows Perona to a midnight Lowland rendezvous with mysterious strangers and eavesdrops on them, sending their indistinct voice murmurs to his chief, Hanley, in Washington, who relays them back to him, amplified. He learns several important things: that Spawn and Perona and a depth bandit named De Boer are together involved in the smuggling; that they have planned a fake robbery of a fortune in radiumized mercury stored at Spawn's mine, to collect the insurance on it and escape paying the Gov-

ernment export fee; and that they plan to kidnap Grant for ransom.

The plotters learn of Grant's absence from Nareda, and suspect that he may be nearby. They start to search for him. Grant barely escapes, with the bandits and conspirators in hot pursuit. He flees to Jetta, hoping that they will be able to get away together; but he finds her tied hand and foot in her room.

The door is tightly sealed.

And close behind him are his pursuers!

CHAPTER VIII

Jetta's Defiance

I MUST go back now to picture what befell Jetta that afternoon while I was at Spawn's mine. It is not my purpose to becloud this narrative with mystery. There was very little mystery about it to Jetta, and I can reconstruct her viewpoint of the events from what she afterward told me.

Jetta's room was in a wing of the house on the side near the pergola. Her window and door looked out upon the patio. When I had retired—that first night in Nareda—Spawn had gone to his daughter and upbraided her for showing herself while he was giving me that first midnight meal.

"You stay in your room: you have nothing to do with him. Hear me?"

"Yes, Father."

From her infancy he had dominated her; it never occurred to either of them that she could disobey. And yet, this time she did; for no sooner was he asleep that night than she came to my window as I have told.

This next day Jetta dutifully had kept herself secluded. She cooked her own breakfast while I was at the Government House, and was again out of sight by noon.

Jetta was nearly always alone. I can picture her sitting there within the narrow walls of her little room. Boy's ragged garb. All possible femininity stripped from her. Yet, within her, the woman's instincts were struggling. She sewed a great deal, she since has told me, there in the cloistered dimness. Making little dresses of silk and bits of finery given her surreptitiously by the neighbor women. Gazing at herself in them with the aid of a tiny mirror. Hiding them away, never daring to wear them openly; until at intervals her father would raid the room, find them and burn them in the kitchen incinerator.

"Instincts of Satan! By damn but I will get these woman's instincts out of you, Jetta!"

AND there were hours when she would try to read hidden books, and look at pictures of the strange fairy world of the Highlands. She could read and write a little: she had gone for a few years to the small Nareda government school, and then been snatched from it by her father.

When Spawn and I had finished that noonday meal, I recall that he left me for a moment. He had gone to Jetta.

"I am taking that young American to the mine. I will return presently. Stay close, Jetta."

"Yes, Father."

He left with me. Jetta remained in her room, her thoughts upon the coming night. She trembled at them. She would meet me again, this evening in the moonlit garden. . . .

The sound of a man walking the garden path aroused her from her reverie. Then came a soft ingratiating voice:

"Jetta, *chica Mia!*"

It was Perona, standing by the pergola preening his effeminate mustache.

"Jetta, little love bird, come out and talk to me."

Jetta slammed the window slide and sat quiet.

"Jetta, it is your Greko."

"Well do I know it," she muttered.

"Jetta!" He strode down the path and back. "Jetta." His voice began rising into a strident, peevish anger.

"Jetta, are you in there? *Chica*, answer me."

No answer.

"Jetta, *por Dios*—" He fumed, then fell to pleading. "Are you in there? Please, little love bird, answer your Greko. Are you in there?"

"Yes."

"Come out then. Come to Greko."

SHE said sweetly, "My father does not want me to talk to men. You know that is so, Señor Perona."

It grounded him. "Why—"

"Is it not so?"

"Y-yes, but I am not—"

"A man?" Little imp! She relished impaling him upon the shafts of her ridicule. Her sport was interrupted by the arrival of Spawn. He had left me at the mine and come directly back home. Jetta heard his heavy tread on the garden path, then his voice:

"Ah, Perona."

And Perona: "Jetta will not come out and talk to me." The waxen mustached Minister of Nareda's Internal Affairs was like a sulky child. But Spawn was unimpressed. Spawn said:

"Well, let her alone. We have more important things to engage us. I have the American occupied at the mine. You heard from De Boer?"

"I went last night. All is ready as we planned. But Spawn, this fool of an American, this Grant—"

"Hush! Not so loud, Perona!"

"I am telling you—!" Perona was excited. His voice rose shrilly, but Spawn checked him.

"Shut up; you waste time. Tell me exactly the arrangements with De Boer. *Le grande coupi* now; to-night most important of nights—and you rant of your troubles with a girl!"

THEY were standing by the pergola, quite near Jetta's shaded window. She crouched there, listening to them. None of this was entirely new to Jetta. She had always been aware more or less of her father's secret business activities. As a child she had not understood them. Nor did she now, with any clarity. Spawn had always talked freely within her hearing, ignoring her, though occasionally he threatened her to keep her mouth shut.

She heard now fragments of this discussion between her father and Perona. They moved away from the pergola and sat by the fountain, speaking too low for her to hear. And then they paced the path, coming nearer, and she caught their voices again. And occasionally they grew excited, or vehement, and then their raised tones were plainly audible to her.

And this that she heard, with what she knew already, and with what subsequently transpired, enables me now to piece together the facts into a connected explanation.

In the establishment of his cinnabar mine some years before, Spawn was originally financed by Perona. The South American was then newly made Minister of Nareda's Internal Affairs. He became Spawn's business partner. They kept the connection secret. Spawn falsified his production records; and Perona with his governmental position was enabled to pass these false accounts of the mine's production. Nareda was systematically cheated of a portion of its legal share.

But this, after a time, did not satisfy the ambitious Perona and Spawn. They began to plan how they might engage in smuggling some of their quicksilver into the United States.

Perona, during these years, had had ambitions of his own in other directions. President Markes, of Nareda, was an honest official. He handicapped Perona considerably. There were many ways by which Perona could have grown rich through a dishonest handling of the government affairs. It was done almost universally in all the small Latin governments. But Markes as President made it dangerous in Nareda. Even the duplicity with the mine was a precarious affair.

THERE was at this time in Nareda a young adventurer named De Boer. A handsome, swaggering fellow

in his late twenties. He was a good talker; he spoke many languages; he could orate with fluency and skilful guile. His smile, his colorful personality, and his gift for oratory, made it easy for him to stir up dissatisfaction among the people.

De Boer became known as a patriot. A revolution in Nareda was brewing. Perona, as Nareda's Minister, was De Boer's political enemy. The Nareda Government ran De Boer out, ending the potential revolution. But Perona and Spawn had always secretly been friends with De Boer. It would have been very handy to have this unscrupulous young scoundrel as President.

When De Boer was banished with some of his most loyal followers, he began a career of petty banditry in the Lowland's depths. Spawn and Perona kept in communication with him, and, by a method which was presently made startlingly clear to Jetta and me, De Boer smuggled the quicksilver for Perona and Spawn. It was this activity which had finally aroused my department and caused Hanley to send me to Nareda.

This however, was a dangerous, precarious occupation. De Boer did not seem to think so, or care. But Perona and Spawn, with their established positions in Nareda, were always fearful of exposure. Even without my coming, they had planned to disconnect from De Boer.

"And for more than that," as Jetta had one day heard Perona remark to her father, "I'll tell to you that this De Boer is not very straight with us, Spawn." De Boer would, upon occasion, fail to make proper return for the smuggled product.

SO now they had planned a last coup in which De Boer was to help, and then they would be done with him: the two of them, Spawn and Perona, would remain as honest citizens of Nareda, and De Boer had agreed to take himself away and pursue his banditry elsewhere.

It was a simple plan; it promised to yield a high stake quickly. A final fling at illicit activity; then virtuous reformation, with Perona marrying the little Jetta.

BENEATH the strong room at the mine, Perona and Spawn had secretly built a cleverly concealed little vault. De Boer, this night just before the midnight hour, was to attack the mine. Spawn and Perona had bribed the police guards to submit to this attack. The guards did not know the details: they only knew that De Boer and his men would make a sham attack, careful to harm none of them—and then De Boer would withdraw. The guards would report that they had been driven away by a large force. And when the excitement was over, the ingots of radiumized quicksilver would have vanished!

De Boer, making away into distant Lowland fastnesses, would obviously be supposed to have taken the treasure. But Perona, hidden alone in the strong-room, would merely carry the ingots down into the secret vault, to be disposed of at some future date. The ingots were well insured, by an international company, against theft. The Nareda government would receive one-third of that insurance as recompense for the loss of its share. Perona and Spawn would get two-thirds—and have the treasure as well.

SUCH was the present plan, into which, all unknown to me, I had been plunged. And my presence complicated things considerably. So much so that Perona grew vehement, this afternoon in the garden, explaining why. His shrill voice carried clearly to Jetta, in spite of Spawn's efforts to shut him up.

"I tell to you that Americano agent will undo us."

"How?" demanded the calmer Spawn.

"Already he has made Markes suspicious."

"Chut! You can befool Markes, Perona. You have for years been doing it."

"This meddling fellow, he has met Jetta!"

"I do not believe it." There was a sudden grimness to Spawn's tone at the thought. "I do not believe it. Jetta would not dare."

"You should have seen him flush when Markes mentioned at the conference this morning that I am to marry Jetta. No one could miss it. He has met her— I tell it to you—and it must have been last night."

"So, you say?" Jetta could see her father's face, white with suppressed rage. "You think that? And it is that this Grant might be your rival, that worries you? Not our plans for tonight, which have real importance—but worrying over a girl."

"She would not talk to me. She would not come out. He has no doubt put wild ideas into her head. Spawn, you listen to me. I have always been more clever than you at scheming. Is it not so? You have always said it. I have a plan now: it fits our arrangements with De Boer, but it will rid us of this Americano. When all is done and I have married Jetta—"

SPAWN interrupted impatiently, "You will marry Jetta, never fear. I have promised her to you."

And because, as Jetta well knew, Perona had made it part of his bargaining in financing Spawn. But this they did not now mention.

"To get rid of this Grant—well, that sounds meritorious. He is dangerous around here. To that I agree."

"And with Jetta—"

"Have done, Perona!" With sudden decision Spawn leaped to his feet. "I do not believe she would have dared talk to Grant. We'll have her out and ask her. If she has, by the gods—"

It fell upon Jetta before she had time to gather her wits. Spawn strode to her door, and found it fastened on the inside.

"Jetta, open at once!"

He thumped with his heavy fists. Confused and trembling she unsealed it, and he dragged her out into the sunlight of the garden.

"Now then, Jetta, you have heard some of what we have been saying, perhaps?"

"Father—"

"About this young American? This Grant?"

She stood cringing in his grasp. Spawn had never used physical violence with Jetta. But he was white with fury now.

"Father, you—you are hurting me."

Perona interposed. "Wait Spawn! Not so rough! Let me talk to her. Jetta, *chica mia*, your Greko is worried—"

"To the hell with that!" Spawn shouted. But he released the girl and she sank trembling to the little seat by the pergola.

Spawn stood over her. "Jetta, look at me! Did you meet—did you talk to Grant last night?"

She wanted to deny it. She clung to his angry gaze. But the habit of all her life of truthfulness with him prevailed.

"Y-yes," she admitted.

CHAPTER IX

Trapped

"SPAWN! Hold!"

There was an instant when it seemed that Spawn would strike the girl. The blood drained from his face, leaving his dark eyes blazing like torches. His hamlike fist went back, but Perona sprang for him and clutched him.

"Hold, Spawn; I will talk to her. Jetta, so you did—"

The torrent of emotion swept Spawn; weakened him so that instead of striking Jetta, he yielded to Perona's clutch and dropped his arm. For a moment he stood gazing at his daughter.

"Is it so? And all my efforts, going

for nothing, just like your mother!" He no more than murmured it, and as Perona pushed him, he sank to the bench beside Jetta. But did not touch her, just sat staring. And she stared back, both of them aghast at the enormity of this, her first disobedience.

I never had opportunity to know Spawn, except for the few times which I have mentioned. Perhaps he was at heart a pathetic figure. I think, looking back on it now that Spawn is dead, that there was a pathos to him. Spawn had loved his wife, Jetta's mother. As a young man he had brought her to the Lowlands to seek his fortune. And when Jetta was an infant, his wife had left him. Run away, abandoning him and their child.

PERHAPS Spawn was never mentally normal after that. He had reared Jetta with the belief that sin was inherent in all females. It obsessed him. Wraped and twisted all his outlook as he brooded on it through the years. Woman's instincts; woman's love of pleasure, pretty clothes—all could lead only to sin.

And so he had kept Jetta secluded. He had fought what he seemed to see in her as she grew and flowered into girlhood, and denied her everything which he thought might make her like her mother.

Spawn met his death within a few hours of this afternoon I am describing. Perhaps he was no more than a scheming scoundrel. We are instinctively lenient with our appraisal of the dead. I do not know.

"Jetta," Perona said to her accusingly, "that is true, then: you did talk with that miserable Americano last night? You sinful, lying girl."

The contrition within Jetta at disobeying her father faded before this attack.

"I am not sinful." The trembling left her, and she sat up and faced the accusing Perona. "I did but talk to him. You speak lies when you say I am sinful."

"You hear, Spawn? Defiant; already changed from the little Jetta I—"

"Yes, I am changed. I do not love you, Señor Perona. I think I hate you." Her tears were very close, but she finished: "I—I won't marry you. I won't!"

It stung Spawn. He leaped to his feet. "So you talk like that! It has gone so far as this, has it? Get to your room! We will see what you will and what you won't!"

AGAIN the crafty Perona was calmest of them all. He thrust himself in front of Spawn.

"Jetta, to-night you plan to see him again, no? To-night?—here?"

"No," she stammered.

"You lie!"

"No."

"You lie! Spawn look at her! Lying! She has planned to meet him to-night! That is all we want to know." He broke into a cackling chuckle. "That fits my new plan, Spawn. A tryst with Jetta, here in the garden."

"Get to your room," Spawn growled. He dragged her back, and Perona followed them.

"You lie there." Spawn flung her to her couch. "After this night's work is done, we'll see whether you will or you won't."

"She may not stay in here," Perona suggested.

"She will stay."

"You seal her in?"

"I will seal her in."

Perona's eyes roved the little bedroom. One window oval and a door, both overlooking the patio.

"But suppose she should get out? There is no way to seal that window properly from outside. A cord!"

A long stout silken tassel-cord had been draped by Jetta at the window curtain. Perona snatched it down.

"If her ankles and wrists were tied with this—"

"No!" burst out Jetta. And then a fear for me rushed over her. A realization, forgotten in the stress of this

conflict with her father, now swept over her. They were planning harm to me.

"No, do not bind me."

A SUDDEN caution came to her. She was making it worse for me. Already she had done me immense harm.

She said suddenly, "Do what you like with me. I was wrong. I have no interest in that American. It is you, Greko, I—I love."

Spawn did not heed her. Perona insisted, "I would tie her with care."

He helped Spawn rope her ankles, and then her wrists, crossed behind her.

"A little gag, Spawn? She might cry out: we want no interference tonight." He was ready with a large silken handkerchief. They thrust it into her mouth and tied it behind her neck.

"There," growled Spawn. "You will and you won't: we shall see about that. Lie still, Jetta. If I have need to come again to you—"

They left her. And this time she heard them less clearly. But there were fragments:

Perona: "I will meet him again. After dark, to-night. Yes, he expects me. For his money, Spawn, his pay in advance. This De Boer works not for nothing."

Spawn: "You will arrange about your police on the streets? He can get here to my house safely?"

"Oh yes, at the tri-evening hour, certainly before midnight, before the attack on the mine. You must stay here, Spawn. Pretend to be asleep: it will lure the fool Americano out in to the moonlight."

JETTA could piece it together fairly well. They would have De Boer come and abduct me. Not tell him I was a government agent, with the micro-safety alarm which they suspected I carried, but just tell De Boer that I was a rich American, who could be abducted and held for a big ransom.

Perona's voice rose with a fragment: "If he springs his alarm, here in the moonlight, you can be here, Spawn, and pretend to try and rescue him. A radio-image of that flashed to Hanley's office will exonerate us of suspicion."

Perona would promise De Boer that the Nareda government would pay the ransom quickly, collecting it later from the United States.

Spawn said, "You think De Boer will believe that?"

"Why should he not? I am skilful at persuasion, no? Let him find out later that the United States Government trackers are after him!" Perona cackled at the thought of it. "What of that? Let him kill this Grant. All the better."

Spawn said abruptly: "The United States may catch De Boer. Have you thought of that, Perona? The fellow would not shield us, but would tell everything."

"And who will believe him? The wild tale of a trapped bandit! Against your word, Spawn? You, an honest and wealthy mine owner? And I—I, Greko Perona, Minister of Internal Affairs of the Sovereign Power of Nareda! Who will dare to give me the lie because a bandit tells a wild tale with no real facts to prop it?"

"Those police guards at the mine to-night?"

"Admit that they took your bribes? You are witless, Spawn! Let them but admit it to me and of a surety I will fling them into imprisonment! Now listen with care, for the after noon is going. . . ."

Their voices lowered, then faded, and Jetta was left alone and helpless. Spawn went back to the mine to meet me. We returned and had supper. Jetta could dimly hear us.

THERE was silence about the house during the mid-evening. I had slipped out, and followed Perona to his meeting with De Boer. Then Spawn had discovered my absence and

had rushed to join Perona and tell him.

But Jetta knew nothing of this. The hour of her tryst with me was approaching. In the darkness of her room as she lay bound and gagged on her couch, she could see the fitful moonlight rising to illumine the window oval.

She squirmed at the cords holding her, but could not loosen them. They cut into her flesh; her limbs were numb.

The evening wore on. Would I come to the garden tryst?

Jetta could not break her bonds. But gradually she had mouthed the gag loose. Then she heard my hurried footsteps in the patio; then my tense voice.

And at her answer I was pounding on her door. But it had been stoutly sealed by Spawn. I flung my shoulder against it, raging, thumping. But the heavy metal panels would not yield; the seal held intact.

"Jetta!"

"Philip, run away! They want to catch you! De Boer, the bandit, is coming!"

"I know it!"

Fool that I was, to pause with talk! There was no time: I must get Jetta out of here. Break down this door.

But it would not yield. A gas torch would melt this outer seal. Was there a torch here at Spawn's? But I had no time to search for a torch! Or a bar with which to ram this door—

A panic seized me, with the fresh realization that any instant De Boer and his men would arrive. I beat with futile fists on the door, and Jetta from within, calling to me to get away before I was caught.

This accursed door between us!

AND then—after no more than half a minute, doubtless— I thought of the window. My momentary panic left me. I dashed to the window oval. Sealed. But the shutter curtain, and the glassite pane behind it, were fragile.

"Jetta, are you near the window?"

"No. On the bed. They have tied me."

"Look out; I'm breaking through!"

There were loose rocks, as large as my head, set to mark the garden path. I seized one and hurled it. With a crash it went through the window and fell to the floor of the room. A jagged hole showed.

"All right, Jetta?"

"Yes! Yes, Philip."

I squirmed through the oval and dropped to the floor. My arms were cut from the jagged glassite, though I did not know it then. It was dim inside the room, but I could see the outline of the bed with her lying on it.

Her ankles and wrists were tied. I cut the cords with my knife.

She was gasping, "They're planning to capture you, Philip! You should not be here! Get away!"

"Yes. But I'm going to take you with me. Can you stand up?"

I SET her on her feet in the center of the room. A shaft of moonlight was coming through the hole in the window.

"Philip! You're bleeding!"

"It is nothing. Cut myself on the glassite. Can you stand alone?"

"Yes."

But her legs, stiffened and numb from having been bound so many hours, bent under her. I caught her as she was falling.

"I'll be—all right in a minute. But Philip, if you stay here—"

"You're going with me!"

"Oh!"

I could carry her, if she could not run. But it would be slow; and it would be difficult to get her through the window. And on the street we would attract too much attention.

"Jetta, try to stand. Stamp your feet. I'll hold you."

I steadied her. Then I bent down, chafing her legs with my hands. Her arms had been limp, but the blood was in them now. She murmured with the

tingling pain, and then bent over, frantically helping me rub the circulation back into her legs.

"Better?"

"Yes." She took a weak and trembling step.

"Wait. Let me rub them more, Jetta."

Precious minutes!

"I'll knock out the rest of the window with that rock! We'll run; we'll be out of here in a moment."

"Run where?"

"Away. Into hiding—out of all this. The United States patrol-ship is coming from Porto Rico. It will take us from here."

"Where?"

"Away. To Great New York, maybe. Away from all this; from that old fossil, Perona."

I was stooping beside her.

"I'm all right now, Philip."

I rose up, and suddenly found myself clasping her in my arms; her slight body in the boy's ragged garb pressed against me.

"Jetta, dear, do you trust me? Will you come?"

"Yes. Oh, yes—anywhere, Philip, with you."

FOR only a breathless instant I lingered, holding her. Then I cast her off and seized the rock from the floor. The jagged glassite fell away under my blows.

"Now, Jetta, I'll go first—"

But it was too late! I stopped, stricken by the sound of a voice outside!

"He's there! In the girl's room! That's her window!"

Cautious voices in the garden! The thud of approaching footsteps.

I shoved Jetta back and rushed to the broken window oval. The figures of De Boer and his men showed in the moonlight across the patio. They had heard me breaking the glassite. And they saw me, now.

"There he is, De Boer!"

We were trapped!

CHAPTER X

The Murder in the Garden

"HANS, keep back! I will go!"

"But Commander—"

"Armed? The hell he is not! Spawn said no. Spawn! Where is Spawn? He was here."

I had dropped back from the window, and, gripping Jetta, stood in the center of the room.

"Jetta, dear."

"Oh, Philip!"

"There's no other way out of here?"

"No! No!"

Only the heavy sealed door, and this broken window. The bandits in the garden had paused at sight of me. Someone had called.

"He may be armed, De Boer."

They had stopped their forward rush and darted into the shelter of the pergola. I might be armed!

We could hear their low voices not ten feet from us. But I was not armed, except for my knife. Futile weapon, indeed.

"Jetta, keep back. If they should fire—"

I GOT a look through the oval. De Boer was advancing upon it, with his barreled projector half levelled. He saw me again. He called:

"You American, come out!"

I crouched on the floor, pushing Jetta back to where the shadows of the bed hid her.

"You American!"

He was close outside the window. "Come out—or I am coming in!"

I said abruptly, "Come!"

My blade was in my hand. If he showed himself I could slash his throat, doubtless. But what about Jetta? My thoughts flashed upon the heels of my defiant invitation. Suppose, as De Boer climbed in the window, I killed him? I could not escape, and his infuriated fellows would rush us, firing through the oval, sweeping the room, killing us both. But Jetta now was in no danger. Her

father was outside, and these bandits were her father's friends. I would have to yield.

I called, louder, "Why don't you come in?"

Could I hold them off? Frighten them off, for a time, and make enough noise so that perhaps someone passing in the nearby street would give the alarm and bring help?

There was a sudden silence in the patio. The bandits had so far made as little commotion as possible. Presently I could hear their low voices.

I HEARD an oath. De Boer's head and shoulders appeared in the window oval! His levelled projector came through. Perhaps he would not have fired, but I did not dare take the chance. I was crouching almost under the muzzle, so I straightened, gripped it, and flung it up. I then slashed at his face with my knife, but he gripped my wrist with powerful fingers. My knife fell as he twisted my wrist. His projector had not fired. It was jammed between us. One of his huge arms reached in and encircled me.

"Damn you!"

He muttered it, but I shouted, "Fool! De Boer, the bandit!"

I was aware of a commotion out in the garden.

". . Bring all Nareda on our ears? De Boer, shut him up!"

I was gripping the projector, struggling to keep its muzzle pointed upwards. With a heave of his giant arms De Boer lifted me and jerked me bodily through the window. I fell on my feet, still fighting. But other hands seized me. It was no use. I yielded suddenly. I panted:

"Enough!"

They held me. One of them growled, "Another shout and we will leave you here dead. Commander, *look!*"

My shirt was torn open. The electrode band about my chest was exposed! De Boer towered head and shoulders over me. I gazed up, passive in the grip of two or three of his men, and saw his face. His heavy jaw dropped as he gazed at my little diaphragms, the electrode.

He knew now for the first time that this was no private citizen he had assaulted. This official apparatus meant that I was a Government agent.

THERE was an instant of shocked silence. An expression grim and furious crossed the giant bandit's face.

"So this is it? Hans, careful—hold him!"

Jetta was still in her room, silent now. I heard Spawn's voice, close at hand in the patio.

"De Boer! Careful!" It was the most cautious of half-whispers.

Abruptly someone reached for my chest; jerked at the electrode; tore its fragile wires—the tiny grids and thumbnail amplifiers; jerked and ripped and flung the whole little apparatus to the garden path. But it sang its warning note as the wires broke. Up in Great New York Hanley knew then that catastrophe had fallen upon me.

For a brief instant the crestfallen bandit mumbled at what he had done. Then came Spawn's voice:

"Got him, De Boer? Good!"

Triumphant Spawn! He advanced across the garden with his heavy tread. And to me, and I am sure to De Boer as well, there came the swift realization that Spawn had been hiding safely in the background. But my detector was smashed now. It might have imaged De Boer assailing me; but now that it was smashed, Spawn could act freely.

"Good! So you have him! Make away to the mine!"

I did not see De Boer's face at that instant. But I saw his weapon come up—an act wholly impulsive, no doubt. A flash of fury!

He levelled the projector, not at me, but at the on-coming Spawn.

"You damn liar!"

"De Boer—" It was a scream of terror from Spawn. But it came too late.

The projector hissed; spat its tiny blue puff. The needle drilled Spawn through the heart. He toppled, flung up his arms, and went down, silently, to sprawl on his face across the garden path.

DE BOER was cursing, startled at his own action. The men holding me tightened their grip. I heard Jetta cry out, but not at what had happened in the garden: she was unaware of that. One of the bandits had left the group and climbed into her room. Her cry now was suppressed, as though the man's hand went over her mouth. And in the silence came his mumbled voice:

"Shut up, you!"

There was the sound of a scuffle in there. I tore at the men holding me.

"Let me go! Jetta! Come out!"

De Boer dashed for the window. I was still struggling. A hand cuffed me in the face. A projector rammed into my side.

"Stop it, fool American!"

De Boer came back with a chastened bandit ahead of him. The man was muttering and rubbing his shoulder, and De Boer said:

"Try anything like that again, Cartner, and I won't be so easy on you."

De Boer was dragging Jetta, holding her by a wrist. She looked like a terrified, half-grown boy, so small was she beside this giant. But the woman's lines of her, and the long dark hair streaming about her white face and over her shoulders, were unmistakable.

"His daughter." De Boer was chuckling. "The little Jetta."

ALL this had happened in certainly no more than five minutes. I realized that no alarm had been raised: the bandits had managed it all with reasonable quiet.

There were six of the bandits here, and De Boer, who towered over us all. I saw him now as a swaggering giant of thirty-odd, with a heavy-set smooth-shaved, handsome face.

He held Jetta off. "Damn, how you have grown, Jetta."

Someone said, "She knows too much."

And someone else, "We will take her with us. If you leave her here, De Boer—"

"Why should I leave her? Why? Leave her—for Perona?"

Then I think that for the first time Jetta saw her father's body lying sprawled on the path. She cried, "Philip!" Then she half turned and murmured: "Father!"

She wavered, almost falling. "Father —" She went down, fainting, falling half against me and against De Boer, who caught her slight body in his arms.

"Come, we'll get back. Drag him!"

"But you can't carry that girl out like that, De Boer."

"Into the house: there is an open door. Hans, go out and bring the car around to this side. Give me the cloaks. There is no alarm yet."

De Boer chuckled again. "Perona was nice to keep the police off this street to-night!"

We went into the kitchen. An autocar, which to the village people might have been there on Spawn's mining business, slid quietly up to the side entrance. A cloak was thrown over Jetta. She was carried like a sack and put into the car.

I suddenly found an opportunity to break loose. I leaped and struck one of the men. But the others were too quickly on me. The kitchen table went over with a crash.

Then something struck me on the back of the head: I think it was the handle of De Boer's great knife. The kitchen and the men struggling with me faded. I went into a roaring blackness.

CHAPTER XI

Aboard the Bandit Flyer

I WAS dimly conscious of being inside the cubby of the car, with bandits sitting over me. The car was roll-

ing through the village streets. Ascending. We must be heading for Spawn's mine. I thought of Jetta. Then I heard her voice and felt her stir beside me.

The roaring in my head made everything dreamlike. I sank half into unconsciousness again. It seemed an endless interval, with only the muttering hiss of the car's mechanism and the confused murmurs of the bandits' voices.

Then my strength came. The cold sweat on me was drying in the night breeze that swept through the car as it climbed the winding ascent. I could see through its side oval a vista of bloated Lowland crags with moonlight on them.

It seemed that we should be nearly to the mine. We stopped. The men in the car began climbing out.

De Boer's voice: "Is he conscious now? I'll take the girl."

Someone bent over me. "You hear me?"

"Yes," I said.

I found myself outside the car. They held me on my feet. Someone gratuitously cuffed me, but De Boer's voice issued a sharp, low-toned rebuke.

"Stop it! Get him and the girl aboard."

THERE seemed thirty or forty men gathered here. Silent dark figures in black robes. The moonlight showed them, and occasionally one flashed a hand search-beam. It was De Boer's main party gathered to attack the mine.

I stood wavering on my feet. I was still weak and dizzy, with a lump on the back of my head where I had been struck. The scene about me was at first unfamiliar. We were in a rocky gully. Rounded broken walls. Caves and crevices. Dried ooze piled like a ramp up one side. The moonlight struggled down through a gathering mist overhead.

I saw, presently, where we were. Above the mine, not below it; and I realized that the car had encircled the mine's cauldron and climbed to a height beyond it. Down the small gully I could see where it opened into the cauldron about a hundred feet below us. The lights of the mine winked in the blurred moonlight shadows.

The bandits led me up the gully. The car was left standing against the gully side where it had halted. De Boer, or one of his men, was carrying Jetta.

The flyer was here. We came upon it suddenly around a bend in the gully. Although I had only seen the nose of it earlier in the evening, I recognized this to be the same. It was in truth a strange looking flyer: I had never seen one quite like it. Barrel-winged, like a Jantzen; multi-propellored; and with folding helicopters for the vertical lifts and descent. And a great spreading fan-tail, in the British fashion. It rested on the rocks like a fat-winged bird with its long cylindrical body puffed out underneath. A seventy-foot cabin; fifteen feet wide, possibly. A line of small window-portes; a circular glassite front to the forward control-observatory cubby, with the propellors just above it, and the pilot cubby up there behind them. And underneath the whole, a landing gear of the Fraser-Mood springed-cushion type; and an expanding, air-coil pontoon-bladder for landing upon water.

ALL this was usual enough. Yet, with the brief glimpses I had as my captors hurried me toward the landing incline, I was aware of something very strange about this flyer. It was all dead black, a bloated-bellied black bird. The moonlight struck it, but did not gleam or shimmer on its black metal surface. The cabin window-portes glowed with a dim blue-gray light from inside. But as I chanced to gaze at one, a green film seemed to cross it like a shade, so that it winked and its light was gone. Yet a hole was there, like an eye-socket. An empty green hole.

We were close to the plane now, ap-

proaching the bottom of the small landing-incline. The wing over my head was like a huge fat barrel cut lengthwise in half. I stared up; and suddenly it seemed that the wing was melting. Fading. Its inner portion, where it joined the body, was clear in the moonlight. But the tips blurred and faded. An aspect curiously leprous. Uncanny. Grewsome.

They took me up the landing-incline. A narrow vaulted corridor ran lengthwise of the interior, along one side of the cabin body. To my left as we headed for the bow control room, the corridor window-portes showed the rocks outside. To the right of the corridor, the ship's small rooms lay in a string. A metal interior. I saw almost nothing save metal in various forms. Grid floor and ceiling. Sheet metal walls and partitions. Furnishings and fabrics, all of spun metal. And all dead black.

We entered the control room. The two men holding me flung me in a chair. I had been searched. They had taken from me the tiny, colored magnesium light-flashes. How easy for the plans of men to go astray! Hanley and I had arranged that I was to signal the Porto Rican patrol-ship with those flares.

"Sit quiet!" commanded my guard.

I retorted, "If you hit me again, I won't."

DE BOER came in, carrying Jetta. He put her in a chair near me, and she sat huddled tense. In the dim gray light of the control room her white face with its big staring dark eyes was turned toward me. But she did not speak, nor did I.

The bandits ignored us. De Boer moved about the room, examining a bank of instruments. Familiar instruments, most of them. The usual aero-controls and navigational devices. A radio audiphone transmitter and receiver, with its attendant eavesdropping cut-offs. And there was an ether-wave mirror-grid. De Boer bent over it. And then I saw him fastening upon his forehead an image-lens. He said:

"You stay here, Hans. You and Gutierrez. Take care of the girl and this fellow Grant. Don't hurt them."

Gutierrez was a swarthy Latin American. He smiled. "For why would I hurt him? You say he is worth much money to us, De Boer. And the girl, ah—"

De Boer towered over him. "Just lay a finger on her and you will regret it, Gutierrez! You stay at your controls. Be ready. This affair it will take no more than half an hour."

A man came to the control room entrance. "You come, Commander?"

"Yes. Right at once."

"The men are ready. From the mine we might almost be seen here. This delay—"

"Coming, Rausch."

BUT he lingered a moment more. "Hans, my finder will show you what I do. Keep watch. When we come back, have all ready for flight. This Grant had an alarm-detector. Heaven only knows what eavesdropping and relaying he has done. And for sure there is hell now in Spawn's garden. The Nareda police are there, of course. They might track us up here."

He paused before me. "I think I would not cause trouble, Grant."

"I'm not a fool."

"Perhaps not." He turned to Jetta. "No harm will come to you. Fear nothing."

He wound his dark cloak about his giant figure and left the control room. In a moment, through the rounded observing pane beside me, I saw him outside on the moonlit rocks. His men gathered about him. There were forty of them, possibly, with ten or so left here aboard to guard the flyer.

And in another moment the group of dark-cloaked figures outside crept off in single file like a slithering serpent, moving down the rocky defile toward where in the cauldron pit the

lights of the mine shone on its dark silent buildings.

CHAPTER XII

The Attack on the Mine

THERE was a moment when I had an opportunity to speak with Jetta. Gutierrez sat watchfully by the archway corridor entrance with a needle projector across his knees. The fellow Hans, a big, heavy-set half-breed Dutchman with a wide-collared leather jerkin and wide, knee-length pantaloons, laid his weapon carefully aside and busied himself with his image mirror. There would soon be images upon it, I knew: De Boer had the lens-finder on his forehead, and the scenes at the mine, as De Boer saw, them would be flashed back to us here.

This Gutierrez was very watchful. A move on my part and I knew he would fling a needle through me.

My thoughts flew. Hanley had notified Porto Rico. The patrol-ship had had almost enough-time to get here by now.

I felt Jetta plucking at me. She whispered:

"They have gone to attack the mine."

"Yes."

"I heard it planned. Señor Perona—"

Her hurried whispers told me further details of Perona's scheme. So this was a pseudo attack! Perona would take advantage of it and hide the quicksilver. De Boer would return presently and escape. And hold me for ransom. I chuckled grimly. Not so easy for a bandit, even one as clever as De Boer at hiding in the Lowland depths to arrange a ransom for an agent of the United States. Our entire Lowland patrol would be after him in a day.

JETTA'S swift whispers made it all clear to me. It was Perona's scheme. She ended, "And my father—" Her voice broke; her eyes flooded suddenly with tears. "Oh, Philip, he was good to me, my poor father."

I saw that the mirror before Hans was glowing with its coming image. I pressed Jetta's hand.

"Yes, Jetta."

One does not disparage the dead. I could not exactly subscribe to Jetta's appraisal of her parent, but I did not say so.

"Jetta, the mirror is on."

I turned away from her toward the instrument table. Gutierrez at the door raised his weapon. I said hastily, "Nothing. I—we just want to see the mirror."

I stood beside Hans. He glanced at me and I tried to smile ingratiatingly.

"This attack will be successful, eh, Hans?"

"Damn, I hope so."

The mirror was glowing. Hans turned a switch to dim the tube-lights of the room so that we might see the images better. It brought a protest from Gutierrez.

I swung around. "I'm not a fool! You can see me perfectly well: kill me if I make trouble. I want to see the attack."

"*Por Dios*, if you try anything—"

"I won't!"

"Shut!" growled Hans. "The audiphone is on. The big adventure—and the commander leaves me here just to watch!"

A SLIT in the observatory pane was open. The dark figure of one of the bandits on guard outside came and called softly up to us.

"Started, Hans?"

"Starting."

"Should it go wrong, call out."

"Yes. But it will not."

"There was an alarm, relayed probably to Great New York, the commander said, from Spawn's garden. These cursed prisoners—"

"Shut! You keep watch out there. It is starting."

The guard slunk away. My attention went back to the mirror. An image was formed there now, coming from the eye of the lens upon De

Boer's forehead. It swayed with his walking. He was evidently leading his men, for none of them were in the scene. The dark rocks were moving past. The lights of the mine were ahead and below, but coming nearer.

The audiphone hummed and crackled. And through it, De Boer's low-voiced command sounded:

"To the left is the better path. Keep working to the left."

The image of the rocks and the mine swung with a dizzying sweep as De Boer turned about. Then again he was creeping forward.

The mine lights came closer. De Boer's whispered voice said: "There they are!"

I COULD see the lights of the mine's guards flash on. A group of Spawn's men gathered before the smelter building. The challenge sounded.

"Who are you? Stop!"

And De Boer's murmur: "That is correct, as Perona said. They expect us. Well," he ended with a sardonic laugh, "expect us."

His projector went up. He fired. In the silence of the control room we could hear the audiphoned hiss of it, and see the flash in the mirror-scene. He had fired into the air.

Again his low voice to his men: "Hold steady. They will run."

The group of figures at the smelter separated, waved and scattered back into the deeper shadows. Their hand-lights were extinguished, but the moonlight caught and showed them. They were running away; hiding in the crags. They fired a shot or two, high in the air.

De Boer was advancing swiftly now. The image swayed and shifted, raised and lowered rhythmically as he ran. And the dark shape of the smelter building loomed large as he neared it.

I felt Jetta beside me; heard her whisper: "Why, he should attack and then come *back!* Greko told my father—"

But De Boer was not coming back! He was dashing for the smelter entrance. Spawn's guards must have known then that there was something wrong. Their shots hissed, still fired high, and our grid sounded their startled shouts. Then as De Boer momentarily turned his head, I saw what was taking place to the side of him. A detachment of the bandits had followed the retreating guards. The bandits' shots were levelled now. Dim stabs of light in the gloom. One of the guards screamed as he was struck.

THE attack was real! But it was over in a moment. Spawn's men, those who were not struck down, plunged away and vanished. Perona had disconnected the mine's electrical safeguards. The smelter door was sealed, but it gave before the blows of a metal bar two of De Boer's men were carrying.

In the unguarded, open strong-room, Perona, alone, was absorbed in his task of carrying the ingots of quicksilver down into the hidden compartment beneath its metal floor.

Our mirror was vague and dim now with a moving interior of the main smelter room as De Boer plunged through. At the strong-room entrance he paused, with his men crowding behind him. The figure of Perona showed in the vague light: he was stooping under the weight of one of the little ingots. Beside him yawned the small trap-opening leading downward.

He saw De Boer. He straightened, startled, and then shouted with a terrified Spanish oath. De Boer's projector was levelled: the huge, foreshortened muzzle of it blotted out half our image. It hissed its puff of light—a blinding flash on our mirror—in the midst of which the dark shape of Perona's body showed as it crumpled and fell. Like Spawn, he met instant death.

Jetta was gripping me. "Why—" Gutierrez was with us. Hahs was bend-

ing forward, watching the mirror. He muttered, "Got him!"

I saw a chance to escape, and pulled at Jetta. But at once Gutierrez stepped backward.

"Like him I will strike you dead!" he said.

NO chance of escape. I had thought Gutierrez absorbed by the mirror, but he was not. I protested vehemently:

"I haven't moved, you fool. I have no intention of moving."

And now De Boer and his men were carrying up the ingots. A man for each bar. A confusion of blurred swaying shapes, and low-voiced, triumphant murmurs from our disc.

Then De Boer was outside the smelter house, and we saw a little queue of the bandits carrying the treasure up the defile. Coming back here to the flyer. There was no pursuit; the mine guards were gone.

The triumphant bandits would be here in a few moments.

"Ave Maria, que magnifico!" Gutierrez had retreated to our doorway, more alert than ever upon me and Jetta. Hans called through the window-slit:

"All is well, Franks!"

"Got it?"

"Yes! Make ready."

There was a stir outside as several of the bandits hastened down the defile to meet De Boer. And the tread of others, inside the flyer at their posts, preparing for hasty departure.

Hans snapped off the audiphone and mirror. He bent over his control panel. "All is well, Gutierrez. In a moment we start."

Through the observatory window I saw the line of De Boer's men coming. Abruptly Hans gave a cry. "Look!"

A GLOW was in the room. A faint aura of light. And our disconnected instruments were crackling, murmuring with interference. Eavesdropping waves were here! Hans realized it: so did I.

But there was no need for theory. From outside came shouts.

"Patrol-ship!"

"Hurry!"

The ship, suddenly exposing its lights, was perfectly visible above us. Five thousand feet up, possibly. A tiny silver bird in the moonlight; but even with the naked eye I could see by its light pattern that it was the official Porto Rican patrol-liner. It saw us down here; recognized this bandit flyer, no doubt.

And it was coming down!

There was a confusion as the bandits rushed aboard. The patrol was dropping in a swift spiral. I watched tensely, holding Jetta, with the turmoil of the embarking bandits around me. Gutierrez stood with levelled weapon.

"They have not moved, Commander."

De Boer was here. The treasure was aboard.

"Ready, Hans. Lift us."

The landing portes clanged as they closed. Hans shoved at his switches. I heard the helicopter engines thumping. A vertical lift: there was no space in this rocky defile for any horizontal take-away.

He was very calm, this De Boer. He sat in a chair at a control-bank of instruments unfamiliar to me.

"Full power, Hans: I tell you. Lift us!"

THE ship was quivering. We lifted. The rocks of the gully dropped away. But the patrol-ship was directly over us. Was De Boer rushing into a collision?

"Now, forward, Hans."

We poised for the level flight. Did De Boer think he could out-distance this patrol-ship, the swiftest type of flyer in the Service? I knew that was impossible.

The silver ship overhead was circling, watchful. And as we levelled for forward flight it shot a warning searchlight beam down across our bow, ordering us to land.

De Boer laughed. "They think they have us!"

I saw his hand go to a switch. A warning siren resounded through our corridor, warning the bandits of De Boer's next move. But I did not know it then; the thing caught me unprepared.

De Boer flung another switch. My senses reeled. I heard Jetta cry out. My arm about her tightened.

A moment of strange whirling unreality. The control room seemed fading about me. The tube-lights dimmed. A green glow took their place—a lurid sheen in which the cubby and the tense faces of De Boer and Hans showed with ghastly pallor. Everything was unreal. The voices of De Boer and Hans sounded with a strange tonelessness. Stripped of the timber that made one differ from the other. Hollow ghosts of human voices. By the sound I could not tell which was De Boer and which was Hans.

The corridor was dark; all the lights on the ship faded into this horrible dead green. The window beside me had a film on it. A dead, dark opening where moonlight had been. Then I realized that I was beginning to see through it once more. Starlight. Then the moonlight.

We had soared almost level with the descending patrol-ship. We went past it, a quarter of a mile away. Went past, and it did not follow. It was still circling.

I KNEW then what had happened. And why this bandit ship had seemed of so strange an aspect. We were invisible! At four hundred yards, even in the moonlight, the patrol could not distinguish us. Only ten of these X-flyers were in existence: they were the closest secret of the U. S. Anti-War Department. No other government had them except in impractical imitations. I had never even seen one before.

But this bandit ship was one. And I recalled that a year ago, a suppressed dispatch intimated that the Service had lost one—wrecked in the Lowlands and never found.

So this was that lost invisible flyer? De Boer, using it for smuggling, with Perona and Spawn as partners. And now, De Boer making away in it with Spawn's treasure!

The bandit's hollow, toneless, unreal chuckle sounded in the grewsome lurid green of the control room.

"I think that surprized them!"

The tiny silver shape of the baffled local patrol-ship faded behind us as we flew northward over heavy, fantastic crags; far above the tiny twinkling lights of the village of Nareda—out over the sullen dark surface of the Nares Sea.

CHAPTER XIII

The Flight to the Bandit Stronghold

DURING this flight of some six hours—north, and then, I think, northeast—to the remote Lowland fastness where De Boer's base was located, I had no opportunity to learn much of the operation of this invisible flyer. But it was the one which had been lost. Wrecked, no doubt, and the small crew aboard it all killed. The vessel, however, was not greatly damaged: the crew were killed doubtless by escaping poisonous gases when the flyer struck.

How long it lay unfound, I cannot say. Perhaps, for days, it still maintained its invisibility, while the frantic planes of the U. S. Anti-War Department tried in vain to locate it. And then, with its magnetic batteries exhausting themselves, it must have become visible. Perona, making a solo flight upon Nareda business to Great London, came upon it. Perona, Spawn and De Boer were then in the midst of their smuggling activities. They salvaged the vessel secretly. De Boer, with an incongruous flair for mechanical science, was enabled in his bandit camp, to recondition the flyer—building a workshop for the purpose, with money which Perona freely supplied.

Some of this I learned from De Boer, some is surmise; but I am sure it is close to the facts.

I HAVE since had an opportunity—through my connection with this adventure which I am recording—of going aboard one of the X-flyers of the Anti-War Department, and seeing it in operation with its technical details explained to me. But since it is so important a Government secret, I cannot set it down here. The principles involved are complex; the postulates employed, and the mathematical formulae developing them in theory, are far too intricate for my understanding. Yet the practical workings are simple indeed. Some of them were understood as far back as 1920 and '30, when that pioneer of modern astrophysics, Albert Einstein, first proved that a ray of light is deflected from its normal straight path when passing through a magnetic field.

I am sorry that I cannot give here more than this vague hint of the workings of the fantastic invisible flyers which to-day are so often the subject of speculation by the general public which never has seen them, and perhaps never will. But I think, too, that a lengthy pedantic discourse here would be out of place. And tiring. After all, I am trying to tell only what happened to me in this adventure. And to little Jetta.

A very strangely capable fellow, this young De Boer. A modern pirate: no other age could have produced him. He did not spare Perona's money, that was obvious. From his hidden camp he must have made frequent visits to the great Highland centers, purchasing scientific equipment; until now, when his path crossed mine, I found him surrounded by most of the every-day devices of our modern world. The village of Nareda was primitive; backward. Save for its modern lights, a few local audiphones and image-finders, and its official etheric connections with other world capitals, it might have been a primitive Latin American village of a hundred years ago.

BUT not so De Boer's camp, which presently I was to see. Nor this, his flyer, with which his smuggling activities had puzzled Hanley's Office for so many months. There was nothing primitive here.

De Boer himself was a swaggering villain. I saw him now with his cloak discarded, in the normal tube-lights of the control room when, after a time, the mechanism of invisibility of the flyer was shut off. A fellow of six feet and a half at the very least, this De Boer. Heavy, yet with his great height and strength, lean and graceful. He wore a fabric shirt, with a wide-rolled collar. A wide belt of tanned hide, with lighters, a little electron drink-cooler and other nick-nackeries hanging from tasseled cords—and a naked, ugly-looking knife blade clipped beside a holster which held an old-fashioned exploding projector of leaden steel-tipped bullets.

His trousers were of leather, wide-flaring, ending at his brawny bare knees, with wide-cut, limp leather boots flapping about his calves in ancient piratical fashion. They had flaring soles, these shoes, for walking upon the Lowland caked ooze. The uppers were useless: I rather think he wore them because they were picturesque. He was a handsome fellow, with rough-hewn features. A wide mouth, and very white, even teeth. A cruel mouth, when it went grim. But the smile was intriguing: I should think particularly so to women.

He had a way with him, this devil-may-care bandit. Strange mixture of a pirate of old and an outlaw of our modern world. With a sash at his waist, a red handkerchief about his forehead, and a bloody knife between his teeth, I could have fancied him a fabled pirate of the Spanish Main, a few hundred years ago when these dry Lowlands held the tossing seas. But I had seen him, so far, largely seated

quietly in his chair at his instrument table, a cigarette dangling from his lips, and, instead of a red bandanna about his forehead, merely the elastic band holding the lens of his image-finder. It caught in the locks of his curly black hair. He pushed it askew; and then, since he did not need it now, discarded it altogether.

WHERE we went I could not surmise, except that we flew low over the sullen black waters of the Nares Sea and then headed northeast. We kept well below the zero-height, with the dark crags of the Lowlands passing under us.

The night grew darker. Storm clouds obscured the moon; and it was then that De Boer shut off the mechanism of invisibility. The control room, with only the watchful Gutierrez now in it—besides De Boer, Jetta and myself—was silent and orderly. But there were sounds of roistering from down the ship's corrider. The bandits, with this treasure of the radiumized quicksilver ingots aboard, were already triumphantly celebrating.

I sat whispering with Jetta. De Boer, busy with charts and navigational instruments, ignored us, and Gutierrez, so long as we did not move, seemed not to object to our whispers.

The night slowly passed. De Boer served us food, calling to one of his men to shove a slide before us. For himself, he merely drank his coffee and an alcoholic drink at his instrument table, while absorbed in his charts.

The roistering of the men grew louder. De Boer leaped to his feet, cursed them roundly, then went back to his calculations. He stood once before Jetta, regarding her with a strange, slow smile which made my heart pound. But he turned away in a moment.

The bandits, for all De Boer's admonitions, were now ill-conditioned for handling this flyer. But I saw, through the small grid-opening in the control room ceiling, the pilot in his cubby upon the wing-top. He sat alert and efficient, with his lookout beside him.

THE night presently turned really tumultuous, with a great wind overhead, and storm clouds of ink, shot through occasionally by lightning flashes. We flew lower, at minus 2,000 feet, on the average. The heavy air was sultry down here, with only a dim blurred vista of the depths beneath us. I fancied that now we were bending eastward, out over the great basin pit of the mid-Atlantic area. No vessels passed us, or, if they did, I did not sight them.

De Boer had a detector on his table. Occasionally it would buzz with calls: liners or patrols in our general neighborhood. He ignored them with a sardonic smile. Once or twice, when our dim lights might have been sighted, he altered our course sharply. And, when at one period we passed over the lights of some Lowland settlement, he flung us again into invisibility until we were beyond range.

I had, during these hours, ample opportunity to whisper with Jetta. But there was so little for us to say. I knew all of Spawn's and Perona's plot. Both were dead; it was De Boer with whom we were menaced now. And as I saw his huge figure lounging at his table, and his frowning, intent face, the vision of the aged, futile Perona, who had previously been my adversary, seemed inoffensive indeed.

De Boer obviously was pleased with himself. He had stolen half a million dollars of treasure, and was making off with it to his base in the depths. He would smuggle these ingots into the world markets at his convenience; months from now, probably. Meanwhile, what did he intend to do with me? And Jetta? Ransom me? I wondered how he could manage it. And the thought pounded me. What about Jetta? I felt now that she was all the world to me. Her safety, beyond any thought of smugglers or treasure, was

all that concerned me. But what was I going to do about it?

I PRESSED her hand. "Jetta, you're not too frightened, are you?"

"No, Philip."

Her mind, I think, was constantly on her father, lying dead back there on his garden path. I had not spoken of him, save once. She threatened instant tears, and I stopped.

"Do not be too frightened. We'll get out of this."

"Yes."

"He can't escape, Jetta; he can't hide. Why, in a day or so all the patrols of the United States Lowland Service will be after us!"

But if the patrol-ships assailed De Boer, if he found things going badly—he could so easily kill Jetta and me. He might be caught, but we would never come through it alive.

My thoughts drifted along, arriving nowhere, just circling in the same futile rounds. I was aware of Jetta falling asleep beside me, her face against my shoulder, her fingers clutching mine. She looked like a half grown, slender, ragged boy. But her woman's hair lay thick on my arm, and one of the dark tresses fell to my hand. I turned my fingers in it. This strange little woman. Was my love for her foredoomed to end in tragedy? I swore then that I would not let it be so.

CHAPTER XIV

Jetta Takes a Hand

I CAME from my reverie to find De Boer before me. He was standing with legs planted wide, arms folded across his deep chest, and on his face an ironic smile.

"So tired! My little captives, *di mi!* You look like babes lost in a wood."

I disengaged myself from Jetta, resting her against a cushion, and she did not awaken. I stood up, fronting De Boer.

"What are you going to do with me?" I demanded.

He held his ironic smile. "Take you to my camp. You'll be well hidden; no one can follow me. My X-flyer is a very handy thing to have, isn't it?"

"So you're the smuggler I was sent after?"

That really amused him. "Er—yes. Those tricksters, Perona and Spawn—we were what you would call partners. He had—the perfumed Perona—what he thought was a clever scheme for us. I was to take all the risk, and he and Spawn get most of the money. Chah! They thought I was imbecile—pretending to attack a treasure and being such a fool that I would not seize it for myself! Not De Boer!" He chuckled. "Well, so very little did they know me. No treasure yet touched De Boer's fingers without lingering!"

HE was in a talkative mood, and drew up his chair and slouched in it. I saw that he had been drinking some alcholite beverage, not enough to befuddle him, but enough to take the keen edge off his wits, and make him want to talk.

"Sit down, Grant."

"I'll stand."

"As you like."

"What are you going to do with me?" I demanded again. "Try to ransom me for a fat price from the United States?"

He smiled sourly. "You need not be sarcastic, young lad. The better for you if I get a ransom."

"Then I hope you get it."

"Perona's idea," he added. "I will admit it looked possible; I did not know then you had Government protection." He went grim. "That was Perona and Spawn's trickery. "Well, they paid for it. No one plays De Boer false and lives to tell it. Perona and Spawn wanted to get rid of you—because you annoyed them."

"Did I?"

"With the little Jetta, I fancy." His gaze went to the sleeping Jetta and back to me. "Perona was very sensitive where this little woman was con-

earned. Why not? An oldish fool like him—"

I COULD agree with that, but I did not say so.

I said, "You'd better cast me loose, Jetta and me. I suppose you realize, De Boer, that you'll have the patrols like a pack of hounds after you. Jetta is a Nareda citizen: the United States will take that up. There's the theft of the treasure. And as you say, I'm a Government agent."

He nodded. "Your Government is over-zealous in protecting its agents. That I know, Grant. I might have left you alone, there in the garden, when I realized it. But that, by damn, was too late! Live men talk. Any way, if I cannot ransom you, to kill you is very easy. And dead men are shut-mouthed."

"I'm still alive, De Boer."

He eyed me. "You talk brave."

This condescending, amused giant!

I retorted, "How are you going to ransom me?"

"That," he said, "I have not yet planned it. A delicate business."

I ventured, "And Jetta?" My heart was beating fast.

"Jetta," he said with a sudden snap, "is none of your business."

Again his gaze went toward her. "I might marry her: why not? I am not wholly a villain. I could marry her legally in Cape Town, with all the trappings of clergy—and be immune from capture under the laws there. If she is seventeen. I have forgotten her age, it's been so long since I knew her. Is she seventeen? She does not look it."

I said shortly, "I don't know how old she is."

"But we can ask her when she awakens, can't we?"

HE was amusing himself with me. And yet, looking back on it now, I believe he was more than half serious. From his pouch he drew a small cylinder. "Have a drink, Grant. After all, I bear you no ill-will. A man can but follow his trade: you were trying to be a good Government agent."

"Thanks."

"And then you may make it possible for me to pick a nice ransom. Here."

"I hope so." I declined the drink.

"Afraid for your wits?"

I said impulsively, "I want all my wits to make sure you handle this ransom properly, De Boer. I'm as interested as you are: in that at least, we are together."

He grinned, tipped the cylinder at his lips for a long drink.

"Quite so—a mutual interest. Let us be friends over it."

His gaze wandered back to Jetta. He added slowly:

"She is very lovely, Grant. A little woodland flower, just ready for plucking." A sentimental tone, but there was in his expression a ribald flippancy that sent a shudder through me. "She has quite overcome you, Grant. Well, why not me as well? I am certainly more of a man than you. We must admit that Perona had a good eye."

MY thoughts were wandering. Suppose I could not find an opportunity to escape with Jetta? De Boer might successfully ransom me and take her to Cape Town. Or if he feared that to try for the ransom would be too dangerous, doubtless he would kill me out of hand. An ill outcome indeed! Nor could I forget that there was half a million of treasure involved.

It was obvious to me that Hanley would not permit the patrol-ships to attack De Boer with the lives of Jetta and myself at stake. Hanley knew, or suspected, that De Boer was operating an invisible flyer, but I did not see how that could help Hanley much. Markes, acting for Nareda, would doubtless be willing to ransom Jetta; the United States would ransom me. I must urge the ransom plan, because for all the money in the world I would not endanger Jetta, nor let this bandit carry her off.

Or could I escape with her, and still find some means to save the treasure? It was Jetta's treasure now, two-thirds of it, for it had legally belonged to her father. Could I save it, and her as well?

Not by any move of mine, here now on this flyer. That was impossible. In De Boer's camp, perhaps. But that, too, I doubted. He was too clever a scoundrel to be lax in guarding me.

But in the effecting of a ransom—the exchange of me, and perhaps Jetta, for a sum of money— that would be a delicate transaction, and some little thing could easily go wrong for De Boer. There would be my chance. I would have to make something go wrong! Get in his confidence now so that I would have some say in arranging the details of the ransom. Make him think I was only concerned for my own safety. Appear clever in helping plan the exchange. And then so manipulate the thing that I could escape with Jetta and save the treasure—and the ransom money as well. And capture De Boer, since that was what Hanley had sent me out to accomplish.

THOUGHTS fly swiftly. All this flashed to me. I had no details as yet. But that I must get into De Boer's confidence stood but clearly.

I said abruptly, "De Boer, since we are to be friends—"

"So you prefer to sit down now?"

"Yes." I had drawn a small settle to face him. "De Boer, do you intend to ask a ransom for Jetta?"

"You insist with that question?"

"That is my way. Then we can understand each other. Do you?"

"No," he said shortly.

I frowned. "I think I could get you a big price."

"I think I should prefer the little Jetta, Grant."

I held myself outwardly unmoved. "I don't blame you. But you will ransom me? It can be worked out. I have some ideas."

"Yes," he agreed. "It can be worked, perhaps. I have not thought of details yet. You are much concerned for your safety, Grant? Fear not."

An amused thought evidently struck him. He added, "It occurs to me how easy, if I am going to ransom you, it will be for me to send you back dead. You might, if I send you back alive, tell them a lot of things about me."

"I will not talk."

"Not," he said, "if I close your mouth for good."

I HAD no retort. There was no answering such logic; and with his murders of Spawn and Perona, and the deaths of some of the police guards at the mine, the murder of me would not put him in much worse a position.

He was laughing ironically. Suddenly he checked himself.

"Well, Jetta! So you have awakened?"

Jetta was sitting erect. How long she had been awake, what she had heard, I could not say. Her gaze went from De Boer to me, and back again.

"Yes, I am awake."

It seemed that the look she flashed me carried a warning. But whatever it was, I had no chance of pondering it, for it was driven from my mind by surprise at her next words.

"Awake, yes! And interested, hearing this Grant bargain with you for his life."

It surprized De Boer as well. But the alcholite had dulled his wits, and Jetta realized this, and presumed upon it.

"Ho!" exclaimed De Boer. "Our little bird is angry!"

"Not angry. It is contempt."

Her look to me now held contempt. It froze me with startled chagrin; but only for an instant, and then the truth swept me. Strange Jetta! I had thought of her only as a child; almost, but not quite a woman. A frightened little woodland fawn.

"Contempt, De Boer. Is he not a contemptuous fellow, this American?"

Again I caught her look and under-

stood it. This was a different Jetta. No longer helplessly frightened, but a woman, fighting. She had heard De Boer calmly saying that he might send me back dead—and she was fighting now for me.

De Boer took another drink, and stared at her. "What is this?"

She turned away. "Nothing. But if you are going to ransom me—"

"I am not, little bird."

SHE showed no aversion for him, and it went to his head, stronger than the drink. "Never would I ransom you!"

He reached for her, but nimbly she avoided him. Acting, but clever enough not to overdo it. I held myself silent: I had caught again the flash of a warning gaze from her. She had fathomed my purpose. Get his confidence. Beguile him. And woman is so much cleverer than the trickiest man at beguilling!

"Do not touch me, De Boer! He tried that. He held my hand in the moonlight—to woo me with his clever words."

"Hah! Grant, you hear her?"

"And I find him now not a man, but a craven—"

"But you will find me a man, Jetta." De Boer was hugely amused. "See Grant, we are rivals! You and Perona, then you and me. It is well for you that I fear you not, or I would run my knife through you now."

I could not mistake Jetta's shudder. But De Boer did not see it, for she covered it by impulsively putting her hand upon his arm.

"Did you—did you kill my father?" She stumbled over the question. But she asked it with a childlike innocence sufficiently reall to convince him.

"I? Why—" He recovered from his surprise. "Why no, little bird. Who told you that I did?"

"No one. I—no one has said anything about it." She added slowly, "I hoped that it was not you, De Boer."

"Me? Oh no: it was an accident." He shot me a menacing glance. "I will explain it all, Jetta. Your father and I were friends for years—"

"Yes. I know. Often he spoke to me of you. Many times I asked him to let me meet you."

THEY were ignoring me. But Gutierrez, lurking in the door oval, was not: I was well aware of that.

"I remember you from years ago, little Jetta."

"And I remember you."

I understand the rationality of her purpose. She could easily get De Boer's confidence. She had known him when a child. Her father had been his business partner, presumably his friend. And I saw her now cleverly altering her status here. She had been a captive, allied with me. She was changing that. She was now Spawn's daughter, here with her dead father's friend.

She turned a gaze of calm aversion upon me. "Unless you want him here, De Boer, I would rather talk to you—without him."

He leaped to his feet. "Hah! that pleases me, little Jetta! Gutierrez, take this fellow away."

The Spanish-American came slouching forward. "The girl's an old friend, Commander? You never told me that."

"Because it is no business of yours. Take him away. Seal him in D-cubby."

I said sullenly, "I misjudged both of you."

Jetta's gaze avoided me. As Gutierrez shoved me roughly down the corridor, De Boer laughed, and his voice came back: "Do not be afraid. We will find some safe way of ransoming you—dead or alive!"

I was flung on a bunk in one of the corridor cubbies, and the door sealed upon me.

(To be continued.)

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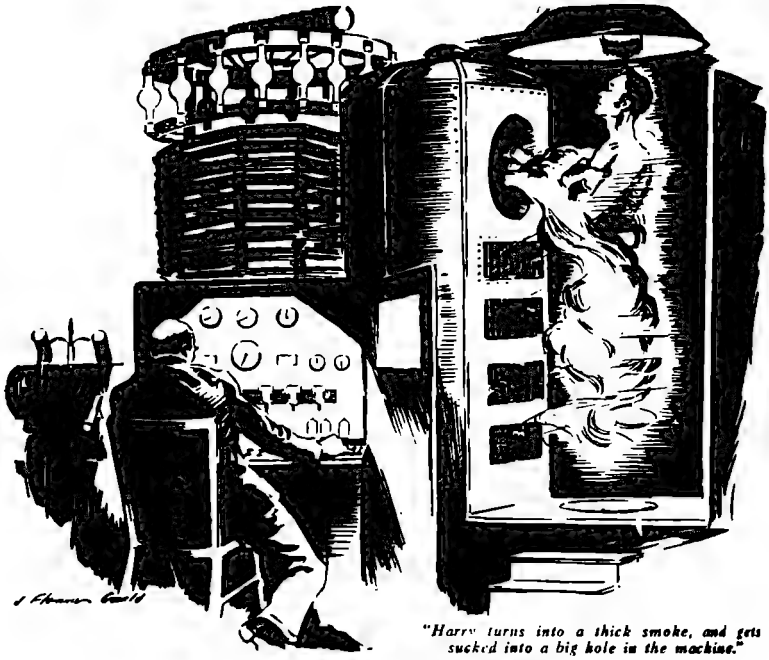

"Harry turns into a thick smoke, and gets sucked into a big hole in the machine."

An Extra Man

By Jackson Gee

RAYS of the August mid-day sun pouring through the museum's glass roof beat upon the eight soldiers surrounding the central exhibit, which for thirty years has been under constant guard. Even the present sweltering heat failed to lessen the men's careful observation of the visitors who, from time to time, strolled listlessly about the room.

Sealed and vigilantly guarded was "Drayle's Invention, 1932"—for it was a scientific achievement beyond which man dared not go.

The object of all this solicitude scarcely seemed to require it. A great up-ended rectangle of polished steel some six feet square by ten or a dozen feet in height, standing in the center of Machinery Hall, it suggested nothing sinister or priceless. Two peculiarities, however, marked it as unusual —the concealment of its mechanism and the brevity of its title. For while the remainder of the exhibits located around it varied in the simplicity or complexity of their design, they were alike in the openness of their construction and detailed explanation of plan and purpose. The great steel box, however, bore merely two words and a date: "Drayle's Invention, 1932."

It was, nevertheless, toward this exhibit that a pleasant appearing white-haired old gentleman and a small boy were slowly walking when a change of guard occurred. The new men took their posts without words while the relieved detail turned down a long corridor that for a moment echoed with the clatter of hobnailed boots on stone. Then all was surprisingly still. Even the boy was impressed into reluctant silence as he viewed the uniformed men, though not for long.

"WHAT'S that, what's that, what's that?" he demanded presently with shrill imperiousness. "Grandfather, what's that?" An excited arm indicated the exhibit with its soldier guard.

"If you can keep still long enough," replied the old gentleman patiently, "I'll tell you."

And with due regard for rheumatic limbs he slowly settled himself on a bench and folded his hands over the top of an ebony cane preparatory to answering the youngster's question. His inquisitor, however, was, at the moment, being hauled from beneath a brass railing by the sergeant of the watch.

"You'll have to keep an eye on him, sir," said the man reproachfully. "He was going to try his knife on the woodwork when I caught him."

"Thank you, Sergeant, I'll do my best —but the younger generation, you know."

"Sit still, if possible!" he directed the squirming boy. "If not, we'll start home now."

The non-com took a new post within easy reaching distance of the disturber and attempted to glare impressively.

"Go on, grandfather, tell me. What's D-r-a-y-l-e? What's in the box? Can't they open it? What are the soldiers for? Must they stay here? Why?"

"Drayle," said the old man, breaking through the barrage of questions, "was a close friend of mine a good many years ago."

"How many, grandfather? Fifty? As much as fifty? Did father know him? Is father fifty?"

"Forty; no; yes; no," said the harrassed relative; and then with amazing ignorance inquired: "Do you really care to hear or do you just ask questions to exercise your tongue?"

"I want to hear the story, grandpa. Tell me the story. Is it a nice story? Has it got bears in it? Polar bears? I saw a polar bear yesterday. He was white. Are polar bears always white? Tell me the story, grandpa."

THE old man turned appealing eyes toward the sergeant. Tacitly a sympathetic understanding was established. The warrior also was a father, and off the field of battle he had known defeat.

"Leave me handle him, sir," he suggested. "I've the like of him at home."

"I'd be very much indebted to you if you would."

Thus encouraged, the soldier produced from an inner pocket and offered one of those childhood sweets known as an "all day sucker."

"See if you can choke yourself on that," he challenged.

The clamor ceased immediately.

"It always works, sir," explained the man of resource. "The missus says as how it'll ruin their indigestions, but I'm all for peace even if I am in the army."

Now that his vocal organs were temporarily plugged, the child waved a demanding arm in the direction of the main exhibit to indicate a desire for the resumption of the narrative. But the ancient was not anxious to disturb so soon the benign and acceptable silence. In fact it was not until he observed the sergeant's look of inquiry that he began once more.

"That box," he said slowly, "is both a monument and a milestone on the road to mankind's progress in mechanical invention. It marks the point beyond which Drayle's contemporaries believed it was unsafe to go; for they

felt that inventions such as his would add to the complexities of life, and that if a halt were not made our own machines would ultimately destroy us.

"I did not, still do not, believe it. And I know Drayle's spirit broke when the authorities sealed his last work in that box and released him upon parole to abandon his experiments."

As the speaker sighed in regretful reminiscence, the sergeant glanced at his men. Apparently all was well; the only visible menace lolled within easy arm's reach, swinging his short legs and sucking noisily on his candy. Nevertheless the non-com shifted to a slightly better tactical position as he awaited the continuance of the tale.

"CHRISTOPHER DRAYLE," said the elderly gentleman, "was the greatest man I have ever known, as well as the finest. Forty years or more ago we were close friends. Our homes on Long Island adjoined and I handled most of his legal affairs. He was about forty-five or six then, but already famous.

"His rediscovery of the ancient process of tempering copper had made him one of the wealthiest men in the land and enabled him to devote his time to scientific research. Electricity and chemistry were his specialties, and at the period of which I speak he was deeply engrossed in problems of radio transmission.

"But he had many interests and not infrequently visited our local country club for an afternoon of golf. Sometimes I played around the course with him, and afterward, over a drink, we would talk. His favorite topic was the contribution of science to human welfare. And even though I could not always follow him when he grew enthusiastic about some new theory I was always puzzled.

"It was at such a time, when we had been discussing the new and first successful attempt to send moving pictures by radio, that I mentioned the prophecy of Jackson Gee. Gee was the writer of fantastic, pseudo-scientific tales who had said: 'We shall soon be able to resolve human beings into their constituent elements, transmit them by radio to any desired point and reassemble them at the other end. We shall do this by means of vibrations. We are just beginning to learn that vibrations are the key to the fundamental process of all life.'

"I LAUGHED as I quoted this to Drayle, for it seemed to me the ravings of a lunatic. But Drayle did not smile. 'Jackson Gee,' he said, 'is nearer to the truth than he imagines. We already know the elements that make the human body, and we can put them together in their proper proportions and arrangements; but we have not been able to introduce the vitalizing spark, the key vibrations to start it going. We can reproduce the human machine, but we can not make it move. We can destroy life in the laboratory, and we can prolong it, but so far we have not been able to create it. Yet I tell you in all seriousness that that time will come; that time will come.'

"I was surprised at his earnestness and would have questioned him further. But a boy appeared just then with a message that Drayle was wanted at the telephone.

" 'Something important, sir,' he said. Drayle went off to answer the summons and later he sent word that he had been called away and would not be able to return.

"It was the last I heard from Drayle for months. He shut himself in his laboratory and saw no one but his assistants, Ward of Boston, and Buchannon of Washington. He even slept in the workshop and had his food sent in.

"Ordinarily I would not have been excluded, for I had his confidence to an unusual degree and I had often watched him work. I admired the deft movements of his hands. He had the certain touch and style of a master. But during that period he admitted only his aids.

"CONSEQUENTLY I felt little hope of reaching him one morning when it was necessary to have his signature to some legal documents. Yet the urgency of the case led me to go to his home on the chance that I might be able to get him long enough for the business that concerned us. Luck was with me, for he sent out word that he would see me in a few minutes. I remember seating myself in the office that opened off his laboratory and wondering what was beyond the door that separated us. I had witnessed some incredible performances in the adjoining room.

"At last Drayle came in. He looked worried and careworn. There were new lines in his face and blue half-circles of fatigue beneath his eyes. It was evident that it was long since he had slept. He apologized for having kept me waiting and then, without examining the papers I offered, he signed his name nervously in the proper spaces. When I gathered the sheets together he turned abruptly toward the laboratory, but at the door he paused and smiled.

"'Give my respects to Jackson Gee,' he said."

"WHO'S Jackson Gee? Does father know him? Has he any polar bears? Aren't you going to tell me about that?"

The tidal wave of questions almost overwhelmed the historian and his auditor. But the military, fortunately, was equal to the emergency. With a tactical turn of his hand he thrust the remnant of the lollypop between the chattering jaws and spoke with sharp rapidity.

"Listen," he commanded, "that there, what you got, is a magic candy, and if you go on exposing it to the air after it is once in your mouth it's likely to disappear, just like that." And the speed of the translation was illustrated by a smart snapping of the fingers.

Doubt shone in the juvenile terror's eyes and the earlier generations waited fearfully while skepticism and greed waged their recurrent conflict. For a time it seemed as if the veteran had blundered; but finally greed triumphed and a temporary peace ensued.

"Where was I?" inquired the interrupted narrator when the issue of battle was settled.

"You was talking about Jackson Gee," answered the guardsman in a cautiously low tone.

"So I was, so I was," the old gentleman agreed somewhat vaguely, nodding his head. He gazed at the sergeant with mingled awe and admiration. "I suppose it's quite useless to mention it," he said rather wistfully, "but if you ever get out of the army and should want a job. You could name your own salary, you know?" The question ended on an appealing note.

Evidently the soldier understood the digression, for he replied in a tone that would brook no dispute. "No, sir, I couldn't consider it."

"I was afraid so," said the other regretfully, and added, with apparent irrelevance, "I have to live with him, you see."

"Tough luck," commiserated the listener.

Reluctantly summoning his thoughts from the pleasant contemplation of what had seemed to offer a new era of peace, the bard turned to his story.

"A FEW hours later," he continued, "I had a telephone call from Drayle's wife, and I realized from the fright in her voice that something dreadful had happened. She asked me to come to the house at once. Chris had been hurt. But she disconnected before I could ask for details. I started immediately and I wondered as I drove what disaster had overtaken him. Anything, it seemed to me, might have befallen in that room of miracles. But I was not prepared to find that Drayle had been shot and wounded.

"The police were before me and already questioning the assailant, Mrs. Farrel, a fiery tempered young Irish-

woman. When I entered the room she was repeating half-hysterically her explanation that Drayle had killed her husband in the laboratory that morning.

"'Right before my eyes, I seen it,' she shouted. 'Harry was standing on a sort of platform looking at a big machine like, and so help me he didn't have a stitch of clothes on, and I started to say something, but all at once there came a terrible sort of screech and a flash like lightnin' kinda, in front of him. Then Harry turns into a sort of thick smoke and I can see right through him like he was a ghost; and then the smoke gets sucked into a big hole in the machine and I know Harry's dead. And here's this man what done it, just a standin' there, grinnin' horrid. So something comes over me all at once and I points Harry's gun at him and pulls the trigger!'

"Even before the woman had finished I recalled what I seen one afternoon in Drayle's laboratory many months before. I had been there for some time watching him when he placed a small tumbler on a work table and asked me if I had ever seen glass shattered by the vibrations of a violin. I told him that I had, but he went through the demonstration as if to satisfy himself. Of course when he drew a bow across the instrument's strings and produced the proper pitch the goblet cracked into pieces exactly as might have been expected. And I wondered why Drayle concerned himself with so childish an experiment before I noticed that he appeared to have forgotten me completely.

"I ENDEAVORED then not to disturb him, and I remember trying to draw myself out of his way and feeling that something momentous was about to take place. Yet actually I believe it would have required a considerable commotion to have distracted his attention, for his ability to concentrate was one of the characteristics of his genius.

"I saw him place another glass on the table, and I noticed then that it stood directly in front of a complicated mechanism. At first this gave out a low humming sound, but it soon rose to an unearthly whining shriek. I shrank from it involuntarily and a second later I was amazed at the sight of the glass, seemingly reduced to a thin vapor, being drawn into a funnel-like opening near the top of the device. I was too startled to speak and could only watch as Drayle started the contrivance again. Once more its noise cut through me with physical pain. I cried out. But my voice was overwhelmed by the terrific din of the mysterious machine.

"Then Drayle strode down the long room to another intricate mass of wire coils and plates and lamps. And I saw a dim glow appear in two of the bulbs and heard a noise like the crackling of paper. Drayle made some adjustments, and presently I observed a peculiar shimmering of the air above a horizontal metal grid. It reminded me of heat waves rising from a summer street, until I saw the vibrations were taking a definite pattern; and that the pattern was that of the glass I had seen dissolved into air. At first the image made me think of a picture formed by a series of horizontal lines close together but broken at various points in such fashion as to create the appearance of a line by the very continuity of the fractures. But as I watched, the phasma became substance. The air ceased to quiver and I was appalled to see Drayle pick up the tumbler and carry it to a scale on which he weighed it with infinite exactness. If he had approached me with it at that moment I would have fled in terror.

"NEXT, Drayle filled the goblet with some liquid which immediately afterward he measured in a beaker. The result seemed to please him, for he smiled happily. At the same instant he became aware of my presence. He looked surprised and then a trifle disconcerted. I could see that he was embarrassed by the knowledge that I had witnessed so much, and

after a second or two he asked my silence. I agreed at once, not only because he requested it but because I couldn't believe the evidence myself. He let me out then and locked the door.

"It was this recollection that made me credit the woman's story. But I was sick with dread, for in spite of my faith in Drayle's genius I feared he had gone mad.

"Mrs. Drayle had listened to Mrs. Farrel's account calmly enough, but I could see the fear in her eyes when she signaled a wish to speak to me alone. I followed her into an adjoining room, leaving Mrs. Farrel with the two policemen and the doctor, who was trying to quiet her.

"As soon as the door closed after us Mrs. Drayle seized my hands.

"'Tim,' she whispered, 'I'm horribly afraid that what the woman says is true. Chris has told me of some wonderful things he was planning to do, but I never expected he would experiment on human beings. Can they send him to prison?'

"Of course I said what I could to comfort her and tried to make my voice sound convincing. At the time the legal aspect of the matter did not worry me so much as the fear that the attack on Drayle might prove fatal. For even if it should develop that he was not dangerously hurt, I imagined that the interruption of the experiment at a critical moment might easily have ruined whatever slim chance there had been of success. For us the nerve-wracking part was that we could do nothing until the surgeon who was attending Drayle could tell us how badly he was injured.

"AT last word came that the bullet had only grazed Drayle's head and stunned him, but that he might remain unconscious for some time. Mrs. Drayle went in and sat at her husband's side, while I returned to the laboratory and found the police greatly bewildered as to whether they ought to arrest Drayle.

"They had discovered in a closet an outfit of men's clothing that Mrs. Farrel identified as her husband's, and, although they saw no other trace of the missing man, they had a desire to lock up somebody as an evidence of their activity. It took considerable persuasion to prevail upon them to withhold their hands. There was no such difficulty about restraining them in the laboratory. They were afraid to touch any apparatus, and they gave the invention a ludicrously wide berth.

"I never knew exactly how long it was that I paced about the lower floor of Drayle's home before the doctor summoned me and announced that the patient wanted me, but that I must be careful not to excite him. I have often wondered how many physicians would have to abandon their profession if they were deprived of that phrase. 'You must not excite the patient.'

"Drayle was already excited when I entered. In fact, he was furious at the doctor's efforts to restrain him. But I realized that my fear for his reason was groundless. His remarks were lucid and forceful as he raged at the interference with his work. As soon as he saw me he appealed for assistance.

"'Make them let me alone, Tim,' he begged, as his wife and the doctor, partly by force and partly by persuasion, endeavored to hold him in bed. 'I must get back to the laboratory. That woman believes that I've killed her husband, and my assistant will think that we've failed.'

"I WAS about to argue with him when suddenly he managed to thrust the doctor aside and start toward the door. His seriousness impressed me so that I gave him a supporting arm and together we headed down the hall, with Mrs. Drayle and the doctor following anxiously in the rear. The laboratory was deserted and locked when we arrived. The police evidently felt it was too uncanny an atmosphere for a prolonged wait.

Drayle opened the door, went directly to his machine and examined it minutely.

"'Thank the Lord that woman hit only me!' he said, and sank into a chair. Then he asked for some brandy. Mrs. Drayle rushed off and reappeared in a minute with a decanter and glass. Drayle helped himself to a swallow that brought color to his cheeks and new strength to his limbs. Immediately after he turned again to the machine. I dragged up a chair, assisted him into it, and seated myself close by.

"I knew little enough about mechanics, but I was fascinated by the numerous gauges that faced me on the gleaming instrument board. There were dials with needlelike hands that registered various numbers; spots of color appeared in narrow slots close to a solar spectrum; a stream of graph-paper tape flowed slowly beneath a tracing-pen point and carried away a jiggly thin line of purple ink. In a moment Drayle was oblivious of everything but his records. I watched him copy the indicated figures, surround them with formulas, and solve mysterious problems with a slide-rule.

"His calculations covered a large sheet before he had finished. At last he underscored three intricate combinations of letters and figures and carried the answers to his private radio apparatus. This operated on a wave length far outside the range of all others and insured him against interference. With it he was able to speak at any time with his assistants in Washington or Boston or with both at once. He threw the switch that sent his call into the air. An answer came instantly, and Drayle began to talk to his distant lieutenants.

"'WE'VE been interrupted, gentlemen,' he said, 'but I think we may continue now. We'll reassemble in the Boston laboratory. Have you arranged the elements? The coefficients are. . .' And he gave a succession of decimals.

"A voice replied that all was ready. Drayle said 'Excellent,' went back to his invention and twisted a black knob on the board before him.

"With this trifling movement all hell seemed to crash about us. The ghastly cacophony that I had experienced in the same room some months previously was as nothing. These stupendous waves of sound pounded us until it seemed as if we must disintegrate beneath them. Wails and screams engulfed us. Mrs. Drayle dropped to her knees beside her husband. The doctor seized my arm and I saw the knuckles of his hand turn white with the pressure of his grip, yet I felt nothing but the awful vibrations that drummed like riveting machines upon and through my nerves and body. It was not an attack upon the ears alone; it crashed upon the heart, beat upon the chest so that breathing seemed impossible. My brain throbbed under the terrific pulsations. For a while I imagined the human system could not endure the ordeal and that all of us must be annihilated.

"Except for his slow turning of the dials Drayle was motionless before the machine. Below the bandage about his forehead I could see his features drawn with anxiety. He had wagered a human life to test his theory and I think the enormity of it had not struck him until that moment.

"What I knew and hoped enabled me to imagine what was taking place in the Boston laboratory. I seemed to see man's elementary dust and vapors whirled from great containers upward into a stratum of shimmering air and gradually assume the outlines of a human form that became first opaque, then solid, and then a sentient being. At the same instant I was conscious that the appalling pandemonium had ceased and that the voice of Drayle's Boston assistant was on the radio.

"'CONGRATULATIONS, Chief! His reassemblage is perfect. There's not a flaw anywhere.'

"'Splendid,' Drayle answered. 'Bring him here by plane right away; his wife is worried about him.'

"Then Drayle turned to me.

"'You see,' he said, 'Jackson Gee was right. We have resolved man into his constituent elements, transmitted his key vibrations by radio, and reassembled him from a supply of identical elements at the other end. And now, if you will assure that woman that her husband is safe, I will get some sleep. You will have the proof before you in less than three hours.'

"I can't vouch for the doctor's feelings, but as Drayle left us I was satisfied that everything was as it should be, and that I had just witnessed the greatest scientific achievement of all time. I did not foresee, nor did Drayle, the results of an error or deliberate disobedience on the part of one of his assistants.

"We waited, the doctor and I, for the arrival of the man who, we were convinced, had been transported some three hundred miles in a manner that defied belief. The evidence would come, Drayle had said, in a few hours. Long before they had elapsed we were starting at the sound of every passing motor, for we knew that a plane must land some distance from the house and that the travelers would make the last mile or so by car.

"Mrs. Drayle endeavored to convince the imagined widow that her husband was safe and was returning speedily. Later she rejoined us, full of questions that we answered in a comforting blind faith. The time limit was drawing to a close when the sound of an automobile horn was quickly followed by a sharp knock on the laboratory door. At a sign from Mrs. Drayle one of the policemen opened it and we saw two men before us. One, a scholarly appearing, bespectacled youth, I recognized as Drayle's Boston assistant, Ward; the other, a rather burly individual, was a stranger to me. But there was no doubt he was the man we awaited so eagerly, for Mrs. Farrel screamed 'Harry! Harry!' and sped across the room towards him.

"AT first she ran her fingers rather timidly over his face, and then pinched his huge shoulders, as if to assure herself of his reality. The sense of touch must have satisfied her, for abruptly she kissed him, flung her arms about him, clung to him, and crooned little endearments. The big man, in turn, patted her cheeks awkwardly and mumbled in a convincingly natural voice, ''Sall right, Mary, old kid! There ain't nothin' to it. Yeah! Sure it's me!'

"Then I was conscious of Drayle's presence. A brown silk dressing gown fell shapelessly about his spare frame and smoke from his cigarette rose in a quivering blue-white stream. Ward spied him at the same moment and stepped forward with quick outstretched hands. I remember the flame of adoring zeal in the youngster's eyes as he tried to speak. At length he managed to stammer some congratulatory phrases while Drayle clapped him affectionately on the back.

"Then Drayle turned to Farrel to ask him how he enjoyed the trip. Farrel grinned and said, 'Fine! It was like a dream, sir! First I'm in one place and then I'm in another and I don't know nothing about how I got there. But I could do with a drink, sir. I ain't used to them airyplanes much.'

"Drayle accepted the hint and suggested that we all celebrate. He gave instructions over a desk telephone and almost immediately a man entered with a small service wagon containing a wide assortment of liquors and glasses. When we had all been served, Ward asked somewhat hesitantly if he might propose a toast, 'To Dr. Drayle, the greatest scientist of all time!'

"WE were of course, already somewhat drunk with excitement as we lifted our glasses. But Drayle would not have it.

"'Let me amend that,' he said. 'Let

us drink to the future of science.'

"'Sure!' said Farrel, very promptly. I think he was somewhat uncertain about 'toast,' but he clung hopefully to the word 'drink.'

"We had raised our glasses again when Drayle, who was facing the door, dropped his. It struck the floor with a little crash and the liquor spattered my ankles. Drayle whispered 'Great God!' I saw in the doorway another Farrel. He was grimy, disheveled, his clothing was torn, and his expression ugly; but his identity with 'Harry' was unescapable. For an instant I suspected Drayle of trickery, of perpetrating some fiendishly elaborate hoax. And then I heard Mrs. Farrel scream, heard the newcomer cry, 'Mary,' and saw two men staring at each other in bewilderment.

"The explanation burst upon me with a horrible suddenness. Farrel had been reconstructed in each of Drayle's distant laboratories, and there stood before us two identities each equally authentic, each the legal husband of the woman who, a few hours previously, had imagined herself a widow. The situation was fantastic, nightmarish, unbelievable and undeniable. My head reeled with the fearful possibilities.

"Drayle was the first to recover his poise. He opened a door leading into an adjoining room and motioned for us all to enter. That is, all but the police. He left them wisely with their liquor. 'Finish it,' he advised them. 'You see no one has been killed.'

"THEY were not quite satisfied, but neither were they certain what they ought to do, and for once displayed common sense by doing nothing. When the door closed after us I saw that Buchannon, the Washington laboratory assistant, was with us. He must have arrived with the second Farrel, although I had not observed him during the confusion attending the former's unexpected appearance. But Drayle had noted him and now seized his shoulders. 'Explain!' he demanded.

"Buchannon's face went white and he shrank under the clutch of Drayle's fingers. Beyond them I saw the two twinlike men standing beside Mrs. Farrel, surveying each other with incredulous recognition and distaste.

"'Explain!' roared Drayle, and tightened his grasp.

"'I thought you said Washington, Chief.' His voice was not convincing. I didn't believe him, nor did Drayle.

"'You lie!' he raged, and floored the man with his fist.

"In a way I couldn't help feeling sorry for the chap. It must have been a frightful temptation to participate in the experiment and I suppose he had not forseen the consequences. But I began to have a glimmering of the magnificent possibilities of the invention for purposes far beyond Drayle's intent. For, I asked myself, why, if such a machine could produce two human identities, why not a score, a hundred, a thousand? The best of the race could be multiplied indefinitely and man could make man at last, literally out of the dust of the earth. The virtue of instantaneous transmission which had been Drayle's aim sank into insignificance beside it. I fancied a race of supermen thus created. And I still believe, Sergeant, that the chance for the world's greatest happiness is sealed within that box you guard. But its first fruits were tragic."

The historian shifted his position on the bench so as to escape the sun that was now reflected dazzlingly by the polished steel casket.

"DRAYLE did not glance again at his disobedient lieutenant. He was concerned with the problem of the extra man, or, I should say, *an* extra man, for both were equal. Never before in the history of the world had two men been absolutely identical. They were, of course, one in thought, possessions and rights, physical attributes and appearance. Mrs. Farrel, as they were beginning to realize, was the wife of both. And I have an un-

worthy suspicion that the red-headed young woman, after she recovered from the shock, was not entirely displeased. The two men, however, finding that each had an arm about her waist, were regarding each other in a way that foretold trouble. Both spoke at the same time and in the same words.

"'Take your hands off my wife!'

"And I think they would have attacked each other then if Drayle hadn't intervened. He said, 'Sit down! All of you!' in so peremptory a voice that we obeyed him.

"'Now,' he went on, 'pay attention to me. I think you realize the situation. The question is, what we shall do about it?' He pointed an accusing finger at the Farrel from Washington. 'You were not authorized to exist; properly we should retransmit you, and without reassembling you would simply cease to be.'

"The man addressed looked terrified. 'It would be murder!' he protested.

"'Would it?' Drayle inquired of me.

"I told him that it could not be proved inasmuch as there would be no *corpus delicti* and hence nothing on which to base a charge.

"But the Washington Farrel seemed to have more than an academic interest in the question and grew obstinate.

"'Nothing doing!' he announced emphatically. 'Here I am and here I stay. I started from this place this morning and now I'm back, and as for that big ape over there I don't know nothing about him—except he'll be dead damn soon if he don't keep away from my wife.'

"THE other Drayle-made man leaped up at this, and again I expected violence. But Buchannon flung himself between, and they subsided, muttering.

"'Very well, then,' Drayle continued, when the room was quiet, 'here is another solution. We can, as you realize, duplicate Mrs. Farrel, and I will double your present possessions.'

"This time it was Mrs. Farrel who was dissatisfied. 'You ain't talking to me,' she informed Drayle. 'Me stand naked in front of all them lamps and get turned into smoke? Not me!' A smile spread over her face and her eyes twinkled with deviltry. 'I didn't never think I'd be in one of them triangles like in the movies, and with my own husbands, but seein' I am, I'm all for keeping them both. Then I might know where one of them was some of the time.'

"But neither of the men took to this idea and the problem appeared increasingly complex. I proposed that the survivor be determined by lot, but this suggestion won no support from anyone. Again the two men spoke at the same instant and in the same words. It was like a carefully rehearsed chorus. 'I know my rights, and I ain't going to be gypped out of them!'

"It was at this point that Drayle attempted bribery. He offered fifty thousand dollars to the man who would abandon Mrs. Farrel. But this scheme fell through because both men sought the opportunity and Mrs. Farrel objected volubly.

"So in the end Drayle promised each of them the same amount as a price for silence and left the matter of their relationships to their own settlement.

"I WAS skeptical of the success of the plan but could offer nothing better. So I drew up a release as legally binding as I knew how to make it in a case without precedent. I remember thinking that if the matter ever came into court the judge would be as much at a loss as I was.

"Our troubles, though, didn't spring from that source. Each of the three parties accepted the arrangement eagerly and Drayle dismissed them with a hand-shake, a wish for luck and a check for fifty thousand dollars each. It's very nice to be wealthy, you know.

"Afterward, we went out and paid off the police. Perhaps that's stating it too bluntly. I mean that Drayle thanked them for their zealous atten-

tion to his interests, regretted that they had been unnecessarily inconvenienced and trusted that they would not take amiss a small token of his appreciation of their devotion to duty. Then he shook hands with them both and I believe I saw a yellow bill transferred on each occasion. At any rate the officers saluted smartly and left.

"Of course I was impatient to question Drayle, but I could see that he was desperately fatigued. So I departed.

"Next morning I found my worst fears exceeded by the events of the night. The three Farrels who had left us in apparently amiable spirits had proceeded to the home of Mrs. and the original Mr. Farrel. There the argument of who was to leave had been resumed. Both men were, of course, of the same mind. Whether both desired to stay or flee I would not presume to say. But an acrimonious dispute led to physical hostilities, and while Mrs. Farrel, according to accounts, cheered them on, they literally fought to the death. Being equally capable, there was naturally, barring interruption, no other possible outcome. I can well believe they employed the same tactics, swung the same blows, and died at the same instant.

"Mrs. Farrel, after carefully retrieving both of her husbands' checks, told a great deal of the story. As might be expected, nobody believed the yarn except our profound federal law makers. They welcomed an opportunity to investigate an outsider for a change and had all of us before a committee.

"Finally the Congress of these United States of America, plus the sagacious Supreme Court, decided that my client wasn't guilty of anything, but that he mustn't do it again. At least that was the gist of it. I recollect that I offered a defense of psycopathic neuroticism.

"As a result of the *obiter dictum* and a resolution by both Houses Assembled Drayle's invention was sealed, dated and placed under guard. That's its history, Sergeant."

THE white-haired old gentleman picked up the high silk hat that added a final touch of distinction to his tall figure, and looked about him as if trying to recall something. At last the idea came.

"By the way," he inquired suddenly, "didn't I have an extraordinarily obnoxious grandson with me when I came?"

The attentive auditor was vastly startled. He surveyed the great hall rapidly, but reflected before he answered.

"No, sir—I mean he ain't no more'n average! But I reckon we'd better find him, anyhow."

His glance had satisfied the sergeant that at least the object of his charge was safe and his men still vigilant. "I'll be back in a minute," he informed them. "Don't let nothin' happen."

"Bring us something more'n a breath," pleaded the corporal, disrespectfully.

The sergeant had already set off at a brisk pace with the story teller. For several minutes as they rushed from room to room the hunt was unrewarded.

"I think, sir," said the sergeant, "we'd better look in the natural history division. There is stuffed animals in there that the kids is fond of."

"You're probably right," the patriarch gasped as he struggled to maintain the gait set by the younger man. "I might have known he didn't really want to hear the story."

"They never do," answered the other over his shoulder. "I'll bet that's him down there on the next floor."

THE two searchers had emerged upon a wide gallery that commanded a clear view of the main entrance, where various specimens of American fauna were mounted in intriguing replicas of their native habitat.

The guard pointed an accusing finger at one of these groups and sprang toward the stairs.

The old gentleman's breath and strength were gone. He could only gaze in the direction that had been indicated by the madly running guard; but he had no doubts. A small boy was certainly digging vigorously at the head of a specimen of *Ursus Polaris* that the curator had represented in the dramatic pose of killing a seal. A protesting wail arose from below as the young naturalist was withdrawn from his field by a capable hand on the slack of his trousers. And presently, chagrined with failure, the culprit was before his grandsire.

"Gee!" he complained, "I was only looking at the polar bear. Are polar bears always white? Are—"

"You'd better take him away, sir," interrupted the sergeant. "He was trying to pry out one of the bear's eyes with the stick of the lollypop I give him. Take him."

The old gentleman extended both hands. His left found a grip in his grandson's coat collar; his right, partly concealing a government engraving, met the guard's with a clasp of gratitude.

"Sergeant," he remarked in a voice tense with feeling, "a half-hour ago I expressed some ridiculous regrets that Drayle's invention had been kept from the world. Now I realize its horrid menace. I shudder to think it might have been responsible for two like him!"

The object of disapproval was shaken indicatively.

"Guard the secret well, Sergeant! Guard it well! The world's peace depends upon you!" The old gentleman's words trembled with conviction.

Then alternately shaking his head and his grandson he marched down the hallway, ebony cane tapping angrily upon the stone.

As the exhausted but happy warrior retraced his steps a high-pitched voice floated after him.

"Grandpa, are polar bears *always* white?"

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE PIRATE PLANET

Beginning a Breath-Taking New Three-Part Novel of Interplanetary Warfare

By Charles W. Diffin

VAGABONDS OF SPACE

A Thrilling Novelette of Adventure in Outer Space

By Harl Vincent

THE WALL OF DEATH

The Story of a Strange Invasion from the Bottom of the World

By Victor Rousseau

JETTA OF THE LOWLANDS

The Conclusion of the Current Novel

By Ray Cummings

——AND OTHERS!

A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

The Invisible X-Flyers

The following is a semi-technical description of the operation of the invisible X-flyers used in "Jetta of the Lowlands," as compiled by Philip Grant in the year 2021 from official records of the Anti-War Department of the United States of North America, and discovered recently by Ray Cummings.

The attainment of mechanical invisibility reached a state of perfection in the year 2000 sufficient to make it practical for many uses. For a century this result had been sought. It came, about the year 2000, not as a single startling discovery, but as the culmination of the patient labor of many men during many years. The popular mind has always considered that science advances by a series of "great scientific discoveries"; "unprecedented"; "revolutionary." That is not so. Each step in the progress of scientific achievement is built most carefully upon the one beneath it. And generally the "revolutionary, unprecedented discovery" has very little of itself that is new; rather is it a new combination of older, perhaps seemingly impractical knowledge. Every scientific theory, every device, is the offspring from a large and varied family tree of many scientific ancestors, each of whom in his day was a remarkable personage.

Thus it is, with the principles of mechanical invisibility. I deal here with the famous X-flyers. The operation of the plane itself is immaterial; its motors; its wing-spread surfaces; its aerial controls. I am concerned only with the scientific principles underlying its power of invisibility.

Three scientific factors are involved: first, the process known as de-electronization; second, the theories of color absorption; third, the natural, inevitable deflection (bending) of light rays when passing through a magnetic field.

I take each of the three in order. The forerunners of de-electronization were the Martel Effects—the experiments of Charles Martel, in Paris, in 1939. A new electric current, of a different character—now called the oscillating current as distinct from the alternating and direct—was developed. Metallic plates were electro-magnetized to produce an enveloping magnetic field of somewhat a different character from any field formerly known.

Dr. Norton Grenfell followed this in 1946 by using the Martell oscillating current to obtain a reverse effect. A similar disturb-

sace of electronic balance. But not a surcharge. An exhaustion. An anti-electrical state, instead of a state of magnetism. A metallic mass so treated—and with a constant flow of oscillating current holding its subnormal electronic balance—was then said to be de-electronized.

Scientific "discoveries" are largely made by the trial and error system. The scientist takes what he finds. Generally he does not know, at first, what it means. Martell took his oscillating current and "discovered" the Martel Magnetic Levitation, whereby gravity was lessened, and then completely nullified. Grenfell, with his de-electronization, increased the power of gravity. The two were combined by Grenfell and his associates—and the secret of interplanetary flight was at hand.

But there was a host of other workers not interested in space flyers; they probed in other directions. It was found that the subnormal magentic field surrounding a metallic substance in a state of de-electronization had two unusual properties: its color absorption was high; and it bent light rays from their normal straight path into a curve abnormally great. Yet, though it absorbed the color of the rays emanating from the de-electronized metal (the metal itself influencing this result), the magnetic field, while bending the rays passing through it from distant objects behind it, nevertheless left their color and all their inherent properties unchanged.

The principles of color absorption are these: a pigment—a paint, a dye, if you will—is "red" because it absorbs from the light rays of the sun all the other colors and leaves only red to be reflected from it to the eye. Or "violet" because all the rest are absorbed, and the violet is reflected. Or "black" because all are absorbed; and "white," the reverse, all blended and reflected. Color is dependent upon vibratory motion. The solar spectrum—its range of visibility through the primary colors from red to violet—can be likened to a range of radio wave-lengths; vibration frequencies; and when we eliminate them all save the "violet"—that is what we have left, in the radio to hear, in color absorption to see.

Thus, a de-electronized metal was found to produce black. Not black as habitually we meet it—a "shiny" black, a "dull" black; but a true black—a real absence of light-gray reflection—a "nothingness to see": in effect, an invisibility.

A word of explanation is necessary regarding the other property of the de-electronized field—the bending of distant light rays into a curve, yet leaving their spectrum unchanged. It was Albert Einstein who first made the statement—in the years following the turn of the century at 1900—that it was a normal, natural thing for a ray of light to be slightly deflected from its straight path when passing through a magnetic field. The claim caused world-wide interest, for upon its truth or falsity the whole fabric of the Einstein Theory of Relativity was woven.

An eclipse of the sun in the 1920's established that light is actually bent in the manner Einstein had calculated. A magnetic field surrounds the sun. In those days they did not know that it is a field of subnormal electronic balance—in effect, the result of de-electronization. It was found, nevertheless, that stars close to the limb of the sun appeared, not in their true positions, but shifted in just the directions and with the amount of shift Einstein predicted. The light rays coming from them to the eye of the observer on Earth were curved in passing so close to the sun. But the color-bands of their spectrums were unaltered.

And some of the stars actually were behind the sun, yet because of the curved path of the light, were visible. I mention this because it is an important aspect of the subject of mechanical invisibility.

With the foregoing factors, the secret of mechanical invisibility is constructed. Gracely, an American—following a long series of world-wide experiments, tests of current strength, frequencies of oscillation, suitable metals, etc., which I cannot detail here—in 1980 was the final developer of the mechanisms subsequently used in the X-flyers.

Gracely produced what he christened "aluminoid-spectrite"—a light-weight alloy which, when carrying an oscillating electronic current of the proper frequency, produced the effects I have described. It absorbed, from the light rays coming from the metal, all the colors of the solar spectrum, well beyond the range of the human eye at both ends of the scale. The result was a "visible nothingness."

A moment's thought will make clear that term. A visible nothingness is not invisibility. The fact that something was there but could not be seen was obvious. A black hat with a light on it and placed against an average background is almost as easy to see as a white hat. Gracely's first crude experiments were made with an aluminoid-spectrite cube—a small brick a foot in each dimension. The cube glowed, turned dark, then black, then was gone. He had it resting on a white table, with a white background. And the fact that the cube was still there, was perfectly obvious. It was as though a hole of nothingness were set against the white table. It outlined the cube; reconstructed it so that for practical purposes the eye saw not a white, aluminoid brick, but a dead black one.

And this is very much what a man sees when he stares at his black hat on a table. The hat occults its background, and thus reconstructs itself.

But when Gracely determined the proper vibrations of his oscillating current to coincide with all the other material factors he was using, the final result was before him—real invisibility. He used a patterned background—a symmetrically checkered surface, most difficult of all. The light rays coming from this background passed through the magnetic field surrounding the invisible colorless cube, and were bent into a curved path. But their own color-spectrum—in actuality the color, shape, all the visible characteristics of the background—was not greatly altered. The observer saw what actually was behind the invisible cube: the checkered background,

sometimes slightly distorted, but nevertheless sufficiently clear for its abnormality to escape notice. Thus the cube's outlines were not reconstructed; and, in effect, it had vanished.

In practical workings with the X-flyers, no such difficult test as Gracely's cube and rectangular, symmetrically patterned background is ever met. The varying background behind a plane—at rest or flying, and particularly at night—demands less perfection of background than Gracely's laboratory conditions. I am informed that an X-flyer can vaguely be seen—or sensed, rather—from some angles and under certain and unfavorable conditions of light, and depending on its line of movement relative to the angle of observation, and the type and color-lighting of its background. But under most conditions it represents a very nearly perfect mechanical invisibility.

There is one aspect of the subject with which I may close this brief paper. I give it without technical explanation; it seems to me an amusing angle.

The theory of stereoscopics—the vision of the twin lenses of the human eyes, set a distance apart to give the perception of depth, of the third dimension—is in itself a subject tremendously interesting, and worthy of anyone's study. I have no space for it here, nor would it be strictly relevant. I need only state that a two-eyed man sees partially around an object (by virtue of the different angles from which each of his eyes gaze at it) and thus sees a trifle more of the background than would otherwise be the case. And this—these two viewpoints blended in his brain—gives him his perception of "depth," of "solidity"—the difference between a real scene of three dimensions and a painted scene on a canvas of two dimensions with only the artist's skill in perspective to simulate the third.

And I cannot refrain from mentioning that in government tests of the Anti-War Department to determine the perfection of the invisibility of the X-flyers, it was a one-eyed man who proved that they were not always totally invisible!—Ray Cummings.

Thank You

Dear Editor:

I just want you to know that I am a reader of your truly named Astounding Stories. I really enjoyed reading the "Spawn of the Stars," also "Brigands of the Moon," and I am very glad to hear that we are going to have another of Charles W. Diffin's stories in the next issue—"The Moon Master."—J. R. Penner, 378 Woodlawn Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.

"A Wiz"

Dear Editor:

I am only a young girl sixteen years of age but am greatly interested in science. I have no master mind by any means, but have worked out many a difficult problem in school for my science prof.

Your magazine is a wiz. I haven't missed an instalment since it started. Give us more stories like "Monsters of Moyen," and "The Beetle Horde."—Josephine Frankhouser, 4948 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

"Pretty Good"

Dear Editor:

I received Astounding Stories for May and it is pretty good. The next issue is number six, and I hope it is better than the previous ones. There have been some stories that do not belong in a Science Fiction magazine, such as: "The Cave of Horror," "The Corpse on the Grating," "The Soul Master," and "The Man who was Dead." There is also another story that was printed in the May issue that, so far as I think, does not belong in this magazine; that is, "Murder Madness."

Even all the other stories seem to be fantastic. Weird. Why not try to publish something on the H. G. Wells, E. R. Burroughs type of stories, also Ray Cummings' "The Man who Mastered Time," or "The Time Machine," by Wells?—Louis Wentzler, 1938 Woodbine St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

From Ye Reader

Dear Ye Ed.:

That sounds rather medieval a little for the editor of so novel a magazine, but nevertheless let's forget that and talk about some astounding stories.

First, I would suggest that you eliminate all stories of interplanetary travel (I would be different), as there are already several magazines on the market which deal almost exclusively with such stories. Now, tales like "The Beetle Horde," and those written by Murray Leinster, and those concerning that Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Bird, and those about the deep sea, like "Into the Ocean's Depths," —such stories are astounding, and good. And once in a while let's have a humorous story. You know: "A bit of humor now and then—"

Well, anyhow, publish any kind of astounding story, just so it is different and does not deal with interplanetary travel.

Now, about the magazine. I think it is a good publication and I like it werra, werra mooch. I bought it on impulse and happened to be lucky enough to get the first issue, and nary an issue have I missed since. Although I possess an abject horror of any kind of insect, I enjoyed "The Beetle Horde" to the fullest extent. But here's hoping nothing like that will really happen.

Another thing I'd like to state is this: Some reader made a remark about not publishing any of Verne's works. I say you should. Why should any such great author be disregarded in so good a magazine? And is it not interesting to note that some of his stories have become actual realizations? Even Poe's should be published. All those dead authors whose stories would be considered good were they living. Why should any person ask not to have such good stories in your magazine? Perhaps there are some people who would enjoy them, but do not have the means nor time to buy these great works in book form. Think it over, ye Ed., think it over.

And now, to finish up, I'll say: are there any readers like me—a girl—or do only men and boys read Astounding Stories?—Gertrude Hemken, 5730 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Short—and Sweet

Dear Editor:

Congratulations! Have followed up every issue of Astounding Stories and have found them the best yet. I have one fault to find and that is you do not publish Astounding Stories often enough. Thirty days is too far between.—Bernard Bauer, 235 Holland St., Syracuse, N. Y.

Yes Sir!

Dear Editor:

I read Astounding Stories all the time, although I'm just a boy. I think they're O. K. They give me a great "kick."

I think "The Moon Master" was the best story I ever read. Please ask Mr. Diffin to write more like it.

But then all the stories are really peppy.—Jack Hudson, St. Mark's School, Southborough, Massachusetts.

"Undoubtedly the Best"

Dear Editor:

Your magazine is undoubtedly the best Science Fiction "mag" on the stands. Why? Because of your authors. There is not another Science Fiction book on the stands that has stories by Victor Rousseau, Murray Leinster, Ray Cummings, A. T. Locke, A. J. Burks, C. W. Diffin, S. W. Ellis and many others.

Some of your readers want stories by Dr. David H. Keller, Ed. Earl Repp and Walter Kately. Well, I just wanted to tell you that I have stopped reading all other Science Fiction "mags" on account of the frequency of these authors in them. So please, please, don't destroy my last stronghold.

Also, I would not be against reprints. There is only one so far who has objected to reprints, while there have been several asking you to reprint A. Merritt's "People of the Pit." It would not only satisfy your present readers, but, because of the great popularity of A. Merritt among the reading circles of to-day, it would gain for you many more readers.

Harl Vincent is an indispensible acquisition to "our" magazine. His stories are not only all excellent but his stories all contain good science. He will bring you many new readers.

May I add my voice to every other reader's in the cry for the reprinting of "People of the Pit," by A. Merritt? Why not give us some stories by him? He's pretty near the best writer living to-day.

I don't care for the Mars stories by Burroughs. He's too much long sword and short sword. A. Merritt, however, is the man for you to get and keep.

The schedule for July looks "doggone good" and suggestive to the imagination. You might increase the contents of the book.

The only thing wrong with the stories is that you have too many repetitions. Please get A. Merritt. If you publish stories by him you will see a very noticeable increase in your subscription column. Another author who would repeat A. Merritt's action on your subscription column is Dr. Edward Elmer Smith. Please see about these authors.—Gabriel Kirschner, Box 301, Temple, Texas.

From Young Miss Nightingale

Dear Editor:

I have been wanting to write to you for a long time but only now am I able to do so. When I first got a copy of your magazine I just grabbed it and started reading it. That magazine had the first instalment of "Brigands of the Moon" in it. Now, after one magazine has been read I nearly burst until the next one comes.

As for the writers, I like Ray Cummings, Harl Vincent, Sewell Peaslee Wright and Murray Leinster best. I like interplanetary stories best. I also like stories of the Fourth Dimension and those of ancient races of people living in uninhabited parts of the earth. So far I have liked especially well "The Ray of Madness," "Cold Light," "From the Ocean Depths" and its sequel "Into the Ocean's Depths," "Brigands of the Moon," and "Murder Madness." Of course, I like the others too. I am only a mere girl (that accounts for this poor typewriting)—only ten years old—but I know my likes and dislikes.—Ellen Laura Nightingale, 228 So. Main St., Fairmont, Minn.

Yessir—H. W. Wessolowski

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the June issue of Astounding Stories. It contained some very interesting stories, such as "Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Cummings, "The Moon Master," by Charles W. Diffin, "Murder Madness," by Murray Leinster, and "Giants of the Ray," by Tom Curry. Although "Out of the Dreadful Depths," by C. D. Willard, was a good story, it does not belong in a Science Fiction magazine.

One of the best improvements you could make on Astounding Stories right now is to cut all edges smooth. I would like to see at least one full page picture with each story.

Wesso is the only good artist you have. Is Wessolowski his real name?—Jack Darrow, 4225 N. Spaulding Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Anent Reincarnation

Dear Editor:

In the July issue of Astounding Stories, a correspondent, Worth K. Bryant, asks some thought-provoking questions about the fascinating subject of reincarnation. Although I have written to Mr. Bryant personally, I would like to present my views on the subject to all your readers.

Mr. Bryant asks: "Could a person remember his own death in a former reincarnation?" Yes, he could—if he could "tune in" on his higher consciousness, or ego. Were that pos-

sible, he could see all his past lives from beginning to end. It is only the physical self that dies; the ego, or true self, is immortal and remembers everything that it has experienced in previous incarnations on the physical plane. But since consciousness on this plane is expressed through the material brain, most human beings are unable to recall their former visits to this world; and it is perhaps better so. If there were not loss of memory our minds would now range over the adventures of thousands of years in the past. It would encompass a vast drama with countless loves and hates, of many lives filled with pathos and tragedy. Thus to distract the mind from the present life would retard our progress. There will come a time in human evolution when the average person will be able to recall his past incarnations, and then there will be no need of argument that we have lived here before, because everyone will remember it.

For those who care to pursue this subject more fully, I recommend "Elementary Theosophy," by L. W. Rogers, obtainable at most public libraries.—Allen Glasser, 1610 University Ave., New York, N. Y.

Prefers the Longer Stories

Dear Editor:

I've been reading your excellent periodical since the first issue, and I feel that I'm entitled to an opportunity to give expression to my reactions to the various issues. Of course, as a whole, the magazines were uniformly good every month, but some of the stories, naturally, were better than others.

In the January issue the best story was "The Beetle Horde" by Victor Rousseau. I expected a lot from this writer, having read his "Draft of Eternity," "The Eye of Balamok" and "The Messiah of the Cylinder." I wasn't disappointed.

The best story in the February issue was "Spawn of the Stars," by Charles Willard Diffin. Diffin is a newcomer as far as I know, but he certainly can write.

"Vandals of the Stars" took the honors in the March issue. A. T. Locke has written some good adventure shorts, but this was his first fantastic story, to the best of my knowledge. Come again, Locke! "Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Gummings was great too.

The best for April was "Monsters of Moyen," by Arthur J. Burks. Clever idea.

Victor Rousseau rang the bell again in the May issue with "The Atom Smasher." Let's have other stories of time-travel—some into the very remote past. Cave man stuff, you know!

"The Moon Master," by Charles Willard Diffin was the best for June. Diffin is one of your best writers.

In the last (July) issue, "The Forgotten Planet," by Sewell Peaslee Wright, I think, takes first place, though hard-pressed by "Earth, the Marauder" and "The Power and the Glory."

Now for a few suggestions. In the first place, let's have less short stories, and more longer ones. In my choice of stories for each issue, with one exception, I picked the novelettes. My reason for so doing is the fact that the authors apparently are not able to do justice to their themes in the shorter lengths. Of course, there are exceptions, like Diffin's "The Power and the Glory."

My second suggestion is this: Why not have a fixed position for your announcement of the stories for the next issue? The last page, for example. This would be more convenient for the readers; besides, those of us who have "our mags" bound into volumes could then cut out the announcement.

Finally, my third suggestion—and the real reason for my writing this letter. Don't you think it would be a good idea to publish in each issue the picture of one of the authors, and a short synopsis of his life? How he started writing, his experiences, etc. I'm certain that I'm not the only reader who's interested in the authors. I hope, if everything else I've said is ignored, you'll at least give this last suggestion serious consideration.

Why not get the opinion of other readers?

Continued and increasing success to Astounding Stories, best of the Science Fiction magazines!—P. A. Lyter, 220 Peffer Street, Harrisburg, Pa.

Mr. Bates Accepts with Pleasure

Dear Editor:

It is with the greatest pleasure I note the addition of Miss Lilith Lorraine to your staff, and her initial effort in your publication, "The Jovian Jest" is but a glimpse of what is to come. The stories which she has written heretofore have been real gems of Science Fiction. May I again congratulate you.

The Science Correspondence Club takes great pleasure in announcing the enrollment of Capt. S. P. Meek and R. F. Starzl as members. These authors are well-known to Astounding Stories readers. Also, we take pleasure in announcing that we have asked Mr. Bates to become an honorary member in recognition of his fine work in furthering Science Fiction.

Our first bulletin has been issued and real progress is started. For those interested, Mr. Raymond A. Palmer at 1431—38th St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, will handle all inquiries.

In closing, let me say that when a story pleases you readers, or the work of some author impresses you, write to the editor and tell him about it. In this way more and better Science Fiction will appear. Let us all give Astounding Stories a big hand, you readers! Best wishes of the Science Correspondence Club and—Walter L. Dennis, F.P.S., 4653 Addison St., Chicago, Illinois.

"Bargain"

Dear Editor:

I have just finished "The Atom Smasher," in your May issue of Astounding Stories, and liked it very much.

This is the first story that I have read in your magazine, although I have read other magazines for the past three years.

I see where you inquire as to the kind of stories your readers want.

Personally, I think stories of interplanetary travel are the best, and most demanded by readers of Science Fiction. Try and have one in each issue.

In my opinion I see no criticisms to be made on your magazine. It certainly would be a bargain at several times the price you ask. I am sure I will continue reading it.—Louis D. Buchanan, Jr., 711 Monroe Ave., Evansville, Indiana.

No "Flash in the Pan"

Dear Editor:

When I bought the first issue of Astounding Stories last December, I was impressed by its array of splendid stories and famous authors. I thought, then, that perhaps that first number was just a flash in the pan, and that succeeding issues would sink to the level of other Science Fiction magazines. Happily, I was wrong. Astounding Stories has more than fulfilled the promise of its initial issue. The stories are undoubtedly the finest of their kind, and written by the most prominent Science Fiction authors of the day. I cannot conceive of any possible improvement in the magazine.

I do wish, though, that you would not heed the gratuitous advice of certain earnest but misguided correspondents. For instance, in the June issue, one Warren Williams of Chicago, suggests that you enlarge the magazine and give each story a full-page illustration, like other Science Fiction periodicals. Mr. Williams evidently favors standardization. As one magazine is, so must the rest be. Please ignore this request, and others like it. Astounding Stories is different, unique; just keep it that way, and you will never lack a host of satisfied readers.

Before closing, I must voice my profound admiration for Murray Leinster's brilliant and engrossing story, "Murder Madness." It's the best serial you've printed so far; though I have high anticipation for Arthur J. Burks' latest novel, "Earth, the Marauder."—Mortimer Weisinger, 3560 Rochambeau Ave., Bronx, New York.

"I Mean Increased"

Dear Editor:

I wish to thank you for your reply to my letter. I did not expect you to give me a personal reply; that was why I asked you to reply to me in "The Readers' Corner." You are the only editor I have ever known of that goes to that trouble of giving personal replies to readers. Other magazines require a nominal fee. That's another score for you!

Your personal letter, as a girl would aptly say, "tickled me all over."

I am sorry I can't get a subscription just yet, but I am "bound" to my newsdealer a little while yet, as I immediately gave him a monthly order for Astounding Stories.

If you are the one who picked the authors, you have the best taste I have ever seen in one person. But couldn't your taste be improved? Pardon me, I mean increased. Namely, please add to your taste: H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard.

If you had different authors, in other words, new, inexperienced authors, I would object to your running more than one serial at a time, but with the marvelous old-timers I have no objections, for they can write long ones far better than they can the shorts. So keep them at work.

The three short stories, "Out of the Dreadful Depths," "The Cavern World" and "Giants of the Ray," were all very good. Ray Cummings was wonderful in the way he handled his "Brigands of the Moon." It was a "wow baby." "Murder Madness" is a great improvement over "Tanks." "Tanks" was the worst I've ever read by Leinster. But he came out of his reverie in "Murder Madness." It's great.

Sewell Peaslee Wright can work wonders with short stories. Keep his "typer" clacking. By the way, may I say a few good words for Sophie Wenzel Ellis? If she can duplicate "Creatures of the Light," make her repeat.

Victor Rousseau's story, "The Beetle Horde," kept me "all het up" throughout. "The Atom Smasher" was excellent. I also greatly like stories of the mighty Atlantis.

I agree with others of your readers that you should not let Astounding Stories be printed in such a small size. Make it a little larger, and give us smoother paper, and you will prosper greatly.

"The Moon Master" was excellent.—Gabriel Kirschner, Box 301, Temple, Texas.

"Could Kick Myself"

Dear Editor:

I have just started reading Astounding Stories and could kick myself for not seeing it sooner. In your latest issue, "The Moon Master," by Charles Diffin, is great. He sure knows how to write adventure with science.

I am a member of the Science Corresponding Club and am glad to say it. In later years the club will be known just like other big clubs of to-day, "Nationally and Scientifically."—John Marcroft, 32 Washington St., Central Falls, R. I.

A Full List

Dear Editor:

In the January number of Astounding Stories Cummings' "Phantom of Reality" was the best, followed by Rousseau's "Beetle Horde."

February: 1—Diffin's "Spawn of the Stars"; 2—Rousseau's "Beetle Horde"; 3—Ellis "Creatures of the Light"; 4—Meek's "The Thief of Time."

March: 1—Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon"; 2—Locke's "Vandals of the Stars"; 3—Meek's "Cold Light."

April: 1—Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon"; 2—Burk's "Monsters of Moyen"; 3—Meek's "Ray of Madness"; 4—Pelcher's "Vampires of Venus."

May: 1—Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon"; 2—Leinster's "Murder Madness"; 3—Rousseau's "Atom-Smasher."

June: 1—Cummings' "Brigands of the Moon"; 2—Leinster's "Murder Madness"; 3—Diffin's "Moon Master."

Please give us a story by H. P. Lovecraft, if you can get one.—Carl Ballard, 202 N. Main St., Danville, Va.

"Words Cannot Express"

Dear Editor:

I have read your wonderful magazine since it was first published, and words cannot express what a fine magazine I think it is. All my life I have hoped that someone would publish a magazine just like Astounding Stories. A magazine just full to the brim with the right kind of stories; thrilling stories of super-science, well written in plain and convincing English by wide awake authors.

I thought that "The Cavern World" was a whiz of a story, and "The Moon Master" was so exciting that I sat up late at night reading it. Let's have more of that kind of science story, that thrills every red-blooded American.

I hope that you print your magazine on better paper.—David Bangs, 190 Marlboro St., Boston, Mass.

Unconvinced

Dear Editor:

I received the latest issue of Astounding Stories, and in looking it through I noticed your comments on reprints. Your argument can easily be shot full of holes, and that's what I intend to do.

First: Those stories bering printed now are far inferior to the reprints. Even your best stories, such as "Murder Madness" and "Brigands of the Moon," cannot be compared with such stories as "Station X," "The Moon Pool," "The Metal Monster," or "The Columbus of Space" and "The Second Deluge."

Second: The Saturday Evening Post cannot be compared with our magazine, for all the stories printed in it can be obtained in book form, while the scientific novels are almost all out of print.

Third: There is surely more than one out of a hundred who haven't read the reprints. Just because some have read them is no reason that they don't want them. I know, for I have a large library of reprints and have read, and own, almost every one of them, yet I would gladly see them again.

Fourth: The authors need not starve. You could easily devote just a small space for reprints, and many would pay twenty-five cents for the magazine.

The fairest and most American idea would be to let your readers vote for this. Here is vote No. 1 for reprints.—Woodrow Gelman, 1606 President St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Praise and Suggestions

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the July issue of Astounding Stories and classify the stories as follows:

"Beyond the Heaviside Layer," good; "Earth, the Marauder," excellent, best in issue; "From an Amber Block," fairly good; "The Terror of Air-Level Six," very good; "The Forgotten Planet," excellent; "The Power and the Glory," good; "Murder Madness," very good, but not so much so as preceding chapters.

Now for a few criticisms:

1. Your magazine (or should I say "our" magazine?) is too small. Of course, it would be a radical change to make it larger, but, like others, I think in the end you would gain rather than lose by it. Most small magazines are cheap affairs, and to have Astounding Stories small brands it as a cheap type of magazine. Small magazines are more likely to be hidden on the newsstands by larger ones, and in most stores the large magazines have the more advantageous positions.

2. The edges of your pages are uneven. You look in the index and find an interesting story is on, for example, page 56. You skim the pages to find it, and from page 43 you find yourself suddenly at page 79. Make the paper more even, please.

3. Don't have advertisements before the stories. Have them in the rear.

4. Have a full page illustration facing the beginning of each story. If at the end of a story you find pages won't turn up right, continue the last page to the back of the book.

Wesso is excellent. Another good artist is Paul, who draws for another Science Fiction magazine. Your cover illustrations are fine.

Summary: Enlarge size of magazine, smooth edges of paper, have advertisements in rear of book, use full page illustrations.

If this is expensive, you could charge twenty-five cents instead of twenty cents, and I, for one, would be glad to pay the extra nickel as I do for other magazines of Science Fiction.—Robert Baldwin, 1427 Judson Ave., Evanston, Illinois.

"The Readers' Corner"

All Readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, authors, scientific principles and possibilities—everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

Although from time to time the Editor may make a comment or so, this is a department primarily for *Readers*, and we want you to make full use of it. Likes, dislikes, criticisms, explanations, roses, brickbats, suggestions—everything's welcome here; so "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and discuss it with all of us!

—*The Editor.*

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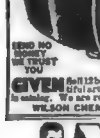

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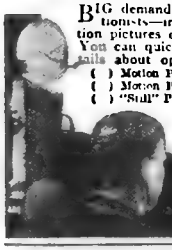

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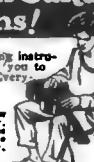

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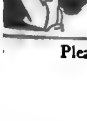

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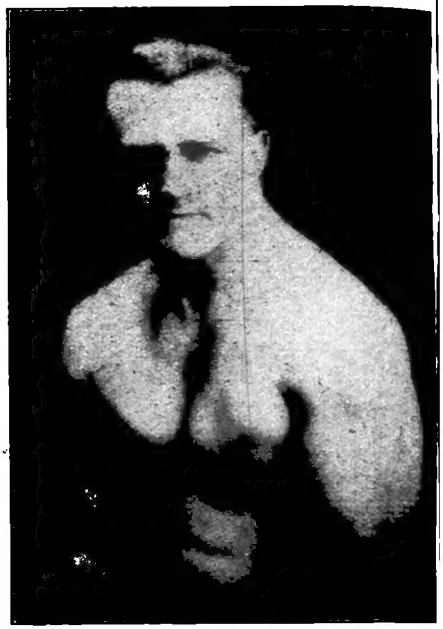

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